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TO
THE MEMORY OF
WANDA BARTHA

Ah, Christ, that it were possible

COMPANION IN E
NOTES FOR AN AUTOBIOG

FOR

I write this book in secret, in a small hotel room at night, in the early hours of dawn in New York. We want to be hidden from the ever more wrathful world in travail. My eyes grown for the moment too sensitive to the events of this turbulent world. But now I concentrate—to exaggerate a trifle, I may hypnotize myself so as to hear nothing, perceiving nothing but the deep, life-giving

one of the numerous mistakes in my life. It is the outcome of an idea that I have always found repugnant, but that has by now, surprisingly, grown into an urge, nay, a compulsion: to violate my own privacy.

The explanation is that I started writing too soon. It would have been better put off.

There are two reasons why I did not wait. For one thing, I was possessed by the thought that my advance age might not leave me time to put in all I wanted to put in. The other reason is that although I am still (Spring of 1948)—at least so I think—in a reasonably normal state of mind, I have seemed to notice in myself the first symptoms of a gradual decline in my own nervous condition since the twenty-eighth of August 1947; it started on that day, and has kept growing ever since. I have a possibly mistaken premonition that these symptoms may foreshadow a sort of depressed condition, in the neuro-pathological sense.

I am quite aware that this is lay talk—the language of a layman with a tendency to hypochondria. I have never consulted a psychiatrist in my life; nor have I the slightest intention of doing so. To me the idea of lying on my back as a patient on a psychiatrist's couch is wholly repugnant.

Accordingly this premonition does not hold over me

take refuge in some massive tome, knowing that it will neither console them or drive them frantic.

In this treatise two physicians threaten me that the use of a fairly serious upset "the irruption of images, feelings and cravings into consciousness leads to distorted views of reality and to falsification of facts." This is not a condition in which I care to write chapters of autobiography; so I must say what I have to say before unmistakable signs of such a condition make their appearance.

That is the only reason for writing at all these chapters of my life; their sole purpose is to satisfy my need to create for Wanda a memorial made of the simple materials at my disposal, paper and ink: a memorial as humble as her short life, as my own qualifications for writing biography. Dedicating a memorial means to me setting down what has happened around and with me during the days, weeks, and months since her death and recording among other personal remembrances of her and new the conversations I had with her after she died. I do not know, I have no idea at all, whether other people will find the same things in the book that the few people who knew us both well will find. Still I cannot resist the absolute compulsion to write it. No amount of writing can assuage my anguish; on the contrary every moment I spend setting down these words is

to expound the large blueprint of a headstone upon the floor. I envied him not only because the slightest affectation, he could be courteous and yet grave in the face of this decease, because the material from which he was to carve the memorial in the Linden Hill Cemetery was granite to endure for centuries, not the mere pages (soon if ever read) of a friend yet sooner forgotten.

Wanda died—my one light
on the twenty-seventh o
eighth of August 1947 in New York. We do
at what hour of the night it was. When the ch
went into her fifteenth-floor room at noon on
the twenty-eighth, Wanda was sitting up in b
back against the pillows. Her bedside light w
and her radio was playing softly. In her left
cigarette. On the bedspread was a book fallen
her right hand. The maid thought she had

"This is the house detective."

"Yes!"

"Your secretary died."

At half-past three the white-coated a we had not been able to raise a doctor he hurried away, "She's been dead two hours."

We think it not impossible that she night. That is why we do not know v date of her death. As late as 11:15 tha on the telephone to her friend Mrs. Illu just back from the airport, seeing h Budapest. That was the last conversatio I had spoken to her for the last time e eight, over the telephone from my roo come down for supper in my room. tired and had already gone to bed. M telephoned to her before I did, inviting ment in 78th Street so that they migh Central Park (there was some hope tha grow a trifle cooler). Her answer to m the same as to me, and she discussed t together the following day. They me plan of a Broadway production that consideration for days with Mrs. Est

the Lászlós' tale, and made a dinner date with them for the following day.

The heat in New York that evening and all through the night was simply unendurable.



After three-thirty in the afternoon, when the ambulance doctor hurried away, and before Wanda had been carried from her room, we had to wait for the police doctor. No one was allowed into her room. First one house detective stood guard before the door. Then a detective and two uniformed policemen came from the station; all four stood in the hall outside her door.

Wanda was ours no more: she belonged to the police because she had died in her sleep in a hotel room in a foreign land without first having been sick, and without a doctor on by her at the moment of her death. We knew the police would soon carry her off, that she would be dissected, cut to pieces. The three of us—my wife Lily, my friend Dr. László, and I—stood side by side, dejected, leaning against the wall opposite Wanda's closet door. While we waited there was a great silence; once in a while now and then we would exchange a few subdued words in Hungarian. Hearing this, one of the uniformed policemen

He must have caught a note of despair in my calm voice. He looked at me in embarrassment knowing what to say.

"Are you Hungarian?" I asked him in English simply to break the unbearable silence.

"I'm American," he said. "My family came from Hungary. I don't speak Hungarian very well."

"Yes, you do," I said. "Very well."

"Thank you," he said, returning to his seat.

"They're Hungarians," he whispered to him.

Then we went on waiting in silence, we Hungarians.

CHAPTER 2

Wanda was handsome and thoroughly attractive. The whole look of her figure, her bearing, her features, notably the delicately drawn outline of her profile—the proportions of her forehead, nose, lips, and chin—, recalled the classic face of Botticelli's women. She looked young, almost childlike. She was a minor miracle: even a few months before her thirty-ninth birthday she looked a scant twenty-five or twenty-six. (On that day, the first of November, we were already paying her a visit at the

the passing women, in the faint hope that some
some figure might recall her, if but for a moment
have carried on this game of self-torture so
persistently that I sometimes wonder if I am
should be.)

But in vain. The women are all either tall
or shorter than she, or stouter than she or thinner
she, or their gait or the set of their head and
is different. So far I have not found one whose
appearance resembles hers in the slightest. I al-
back from these walks with the feeling, new in
nature to me, that the improbable was yet
has remained unique in the world. I often see
this realization, now so unlikely-seeming and
ing, may lose its significance with time, slow-
way to the age-old commonplace that no
on a tree are alike. But my avidly searching
not be convinced. They insist that my feeling
subject can never become so matter of fact.

She was excessively soft-spoken. She had been
Her large, warm, intelligent brown eyes shone
liantly, which a doctor we knew in Budapest
was a sign of thyroid disturbances. Thinking
I am obsessed by the unscientific notion that
thyroid disturbances but the light of her

t succeed in bringing her alive before you.*) For to give a true picture of her, she would have to be further from my heart. (When a portrait-painter is at work he often falls back a step or two to gain a perspective of his model. Of this I am incapable. Her picture is not before my eyes: it is inside me, with them.)



The finest part of her face was the eyes. From the sculptor's point of view her best feature was her nose—small, regular, well-proportioned, and just the least turned up. It seemed just the least bit to sniff the air as you could not tell whether her nose actually grew that way or whether she held her head so because she was more concerned with heaven than with earth.

During the war, when she was rolling bandages in one of the Red Cross workrooms, she wore the regulation nurse's uniform with a white cap. I mention it up here only because it seemed to flirt and quiver playfully, almost as timidly, as her nose. She did not put it exactly straight on her head. She wore it tilted just the merest touch to one side—just enough to hint at brightness and a touchingly modest wish to please and a vigorously suppressed youthful light heartedness.

outward cleanliness. Alfred Polgar, a great Viennese author now in this country, who was past seventy when he first met her at a party, used to say: "When Wanda comes into the room, the air grows clearer."

Her feminine desire to please was just the bare permissible minimum for any pretty woman, and not a hair beyond. More than this would have been coquetry; less would have been affectation.

On the outside world, Wanda made the impression of a completely balanced person. Inwardly she was the very opposite, more particularly after she discovered definitely by a frantic year of letter writing and telegraphic inquiries that her brother Michael, whom she worshipped, and with whom she had been brought up by her guardian, had been tortured and murdered by the Germans at Auschwitz.



(We escaped being tortured and murdered—in Budapest or a concentration camp, like so many of our relatives and friends—by fleeing abroad; but this merely prolonged our lives a few years. The inevitable annual blow of fate fell upon Wanda in 1946, when she learned that her brother, whom she had loved most, had

is measured out to each human life, and if long without great suffering, life "*tarditate gravitate compensat*,"—makes up for delays by added intensity.)



In Wanda's bearing you could sense gentle suffering that she concealed with extraordinary control. You felt, further, a silent but unflinching of critical justice. With all this went an innerness that was not of this world. Her kindness, more than kindness, it was gifted and poetic; of a playful form, which went to show how much she enjoyed, and even pampered this quality in



The dry-cleaner ruined her best topcoat, which she had bought years before in Geneva. The fabric shrank so that she could not get it on. She sent it back. She waited, got it again, but it was never the same. It was a ward.

"That was my favorite coat," she sighed, looking at it in a trunk.

I said, "I'll call up our lawyer right away and let him write a letter to the cleaner."

"But it'll be his headache."

"They have no right to ruin your coat. You even paid them to do it. They'll give you a new coat. The lawyer will see to it."

"No, no."

"Why not?"

"I could never bring myself to wear the new coat."

"Why?"

"On account of that old clerk. With the thick glasses he scarcely sees at all. He accepted the coat, and they told him responsible for taking in a material that would shrink."

She hid the coat in a trunk. After she died we found it buried deep under her things. She put it away so that we should not find it and use it as evidence for legislation. ("On account of that old clerk.")



In one of the streets in our neighborhood there is a little grocery. Her grocery. One evening as we were walking home we passed by the shop. She was carrying a little package tied with blue ribbon.

"Just a minute," she said, "I'll step in and get some oranges." I waited. She came out with the oranges, but without the package in the blue ribbon.

"I don't understand. What's in the package?"

"Nothing."

"What is this, a secret?"

She shook her head reproachfully. "Your curiosity is terrible," she said. "I left it there on purpose. It is the present for the grocer's wife. She had a baby this morning."

The day after her funeral I passed by the grocery store. The grocer caught sight of me, came out and ran across the street. We shook hands. He said, "My wife and I were at the funeral home, and paid our respects to dear Wanda. She was a true friend and real lady." That was what comforted me. The grocer said. What comforted me at this agonizing moment was that Wanda assuredly knew that the grocer and his wife loved her, and that it gave her pleasure. One of her greatest delights was to see from the faces of the simple people and strangers that they had grown fond of her.

And she was proud, too, of the fact that the chambermaids grew fond of her within a day or two, no matter what hotel we were at. This was most conspicuous at the seaside hotels near the French Italian front. I have seen the chambermaids who had been with her

port stay, friends often send them flowers. They never
take more than a few of the farewell bouquets with
them, at most; the rest they leave behind. The chamber-
maids on the Italian Riviera could not sell the bouquets
the Riviera florists would not buy "used" flowers. After
all, in winter that region is the center of the European
flower trade. Whole trainloads of flowers go northward
from Ventimiglia and the surrounding countryside be-
fore and after Christmas. So the chambermaids vie
with each other in massing Wanda's room with flowers.
Of course, she acknowledged this with generous tips.
And the result was a vicious circle: every evening she
could find her room more and more crowded with
bouquets, until it looked like a small florist's shop, and
in the end the tips ran to more than the flowers would
have cost to buy.



In front of the railroad station at San Remo, as
at most small stations in Italy, there was a hack stand with
a dozen one-horse cabs. Business was not very good.
Three out of the dozen cabs belonged to three obvious
devoted brothers, whom we called the Brotherly Lo-
rio. We would often hire a cab for trips to surround-
ing villages. I was never allowed to take any except
one belonging to one of the three brothers.

At San Remo on the Italian Riviera we took our meals at a very simple little tavern. (My income as a European playwright had practically ceased; savings had been squandered. Hence the inexpensive tavern.) One night loud wails were heard from the basement kitchen. "What's the matter?" we asked.

"The cook's arm hurts him," said the waiter. "He's having a nasty spell of rheumatism."

That very afternoon Wanda was crouching by the basement window, handing him her "lunady" ointment which she regarded as a miracle drug, and explaining to him how it should be applied to the affected part. Next day the waiter set on our table as an appetizer a large dish of ravioli fragrant with butter and topped with a layer of dough colored green with spinach. The ravioli was wreathed in a wreath of red carnations. "Comments of the house." He set it before Wanda. It was so tempting that I tasted one bit. "Delicious," I said. "The best ravioli I've ever had in Italy."

And indeed it truly was. Wanda removed the carnations from the plate, which I set before me. "It's the only Italian dish I do not like for."

an I; it had been her favorite dish since childhood. Simply to show how life's sweet trifles may turn after-ward to bitter moments for people like me who have relied themselves on ability to hide their emotions, I must confess today that I bitterly repent the moment when I found her out. I was annoyed at the time because she had deprived herself even of a thing so unimportant, yet a thing she liked. So, instead of earning delayed thanks from me, all she had was reproaches, first for making me feel belatedly guilty about accepting her silly and unnecessary sacrifice, and second for having dished a mass of starch to a man whom the doctor had forbidden fattening food. (Being well aware that the record of this late repentance is as insignificant as a lesson in living could be, I may say that when I handed such gems of wisdom to Wanda, I would invariably remark that I valued them no more than two pennies dropped in a child's piggy-bank, and that if Descartes or Emerson had been alive he could have burst a tank with a thousand dollars' worth of teaching in the same time and with perhaps less effort than I made. For at least, I told her, I had put in my two cents' worth.) Wanda's inborn, unbounded, resourceful kindliness brought her much joy and even more suffering. It was the destiny of every truly good soul to know more suffering than delight. The life of Jesus was not the first example of this, nor the last.

Her kindness shone most clearly in her sad little smile. I was particularly fond of this smile for the reason that its quality was almost that of my own smile, I remember when I was her age. (I by no means intend to imply that I even approached her kindness. I am speaking only of the peculiar quality of a smile.) Her smiles were often misunderstood; people saw it superficial. I thought it ironical, although in her case yet more so in mine—it was really rather sad. But because both of us, from pride and reserve, always tried to keep our kindness hidden, we disciplined our smiles into half smiles. A half smile is always a distorted smile, and distorted smiles always pass for ironical. Portrait painters will understand what I mean.

One more pencil stroke in this random and impetuous character sketch—Wanda's sense of duty and decorum compelled her to throttle fiercely the inborn human extravagance that was natural to her. What remained in this bitter struggle was that noblest form of extravagance, generosity.

an excellent memory, raised her far above the level of the average "cultured" or "well-read" woman. But she never betrayed a hint of this, even among her intimates, unless she was absolutely driven to. I used to think that the way she concealed her learning was pride, headed, and that I didn't see the use of knowing much if she would not let anyone else profit by it. But still she took pride in it when anyone discovered behind her taciturnity and passivity, the values within. I know she was greatly pleased when my dear and esteemed friend S. N. Behrman detected her well-developed faculty from some chance remarks over dinner at the Behrmans', and used her help in writing her *New Yorker* profile of me. She was proud as Punch when Mr. Behrman praised her research, her selection of facts, and her checking of mistakes in material. One night while Mr. Behrman was working on the profile, her typewriter clattered all night: she did a long memorandum correcting or denying bogus stories invented haphazard and eagerly offered to Mr. Behrman as *The New Yorker* by my so-called friends when they heard that a profile of me was on the way. When I found to her delight that Mr. Behrman accepted all her comments.

and abroad, which have shown me in a distorting mirror. For forty years past, less than half are actually mine. Much the greater part were fathered by others. I have told many a story in my day, but usually not the ones credited to me. Furthermore the great majority of my own so-called witticisms, though not downright puns, were rooted in the peculiarities of the Hungarian language, which is unlike any other in Europe, and so were quite untranslatable. Some of these were eventually picked up by anecdote-butchers, and doctored or completely altered to suit their own styles. Furthermore, a number of timid souls, intent on doing witty mischief to others but afraid of having their ears boxed for their devastating remarks, have attributed their own once vicious and humorous sallies to me. Other stories, particularly in the cafés of Vienna and Budapest, were fathered on me by people who made their living attaching the names of the living to hoary anecdotes, thus making the stories into more salable merchandise.

In 1916, for instance, a columnist on a Vienna newspaper wrote that when I got back from a tour of duty as a war correspondent on the battlefields of Poland, I told a story of a once-beautiful Viennese girl, her face ravaged by smallpox, who received her returning fiancé heavily veiled; while he, having lost his sight in the war,

upon the identical story, only told of one Count Ha a hussar officer, in the memoirs of the Prince de Lig who died in 1814, exactly 102 years before I "brou back the true story from Warsaw," as the Vienna p. had it. Years later I rediscovered the tale in the 2 year-old memoirs of the French nobleman, Talleman des Réaux (1619-1692), entitled "*Historiettes*" which by the way, is still the classic gold-mine of plots for French playwrights and story-tellers, the great Guy de Maupassant included. In fact the nine thick volumes of Talleman des Réaux were once recommended to me by a Viennese theater manager as an inexhaustible source of well-rounded stories suitable for conversion into brand-new original comedies.

I told Wanda this instance of my story telling inventiveness in 1944, at Lake Placid, after we saw a Hollywood picture a tear-jerker that ended with a woman meeting her one-time husband after a long separation during which she had grown old and ugly and he had gone blind.

I have grown resigned to this sort of thing. You can oppose such avalanches once they start to slide. Just as the late Tristan Bernard, the famous French humorist did. He was always being victimized in the same way.

e money. (You must know that a soldier stands guard with shouldered rifle day and night outside every government building in Paris.) When Tristan Bernard viewed the last thousand francs and walked out of the main portal, he stepped up to the soldier, slapped him on the back, and said, "You can go home now." This was the best known story about Tristan Bernard and had gone the rounds of newspapers the world over when I finished retelling it. M. Bernard gave me a mischievous smile.

"Not true," he said.

In my embarrassment I began to apologize.

"Never mind," he said. "I never object when a story is good. Every humorist is a Christmas tree which others have a passion for hanging their own liars on. It doesn't hurt."

When he said this he was already a wise and smiling philosopher, I was much younger. At the time I was not quite ready to agree that it didn't hurt.

Years later, as I say, I grew resigned to this sort of thing. Wanda, however, resented all these manufactured lies, more particularly the ones that were insulting to others. She called these "hateful and harmful lies." "Write a letter to the editor," she said, "and tell them that nasty story isn't yours."

"You ought to anyhow."

I still cannot quite get rid of the suspicion that secretly she would sometimes write herself. This is a mere surmise, I set it down here, for suspicion is one more proof of my grateful loyalty as a friend.



In exactly the same way (with a few exceptions, to wit: plays produced by Gilbert and the Theatre Guild), the adapters of many of my plays have replaced many of my lines with the creations of their own brains—this not so much in Vienna as in France, America, and above all in England. In other words, they have simply falsified the plays. I have learned from others more often than I have read, and I have accepted in silence—as I still accept—much of the criticism of honest critics based on stale gags and clumsy dramatic construction introduced by adapters trying to earn their pay at all costs. Their faulty instinct would cut necessary scenes in half, and inflate necessarily short scenes to double their proper length, and so forth.)

sign to convince me that I must not put up with evening. But by then it was too late. The bulk of translated work was already the "property," in distorted, and polluted scripts, of foreign agents and producers. I had no right and no opportunity in the world to alter this material, nor shall I have. Furthermore, prejudiced information on this subject may be found in a book by L. J. Gergely, published in Philadelphia in 1947, under the title *Hungarian Drama in New York*.

Wanda had a horror that might almost be called pathological of sparkling in company. I have never known a human being with less sense of his own social alliance than she had. When I first read, I rather than Alfred Adler's book, in the library of an Austro-Hungarian the expression "inferiority complex," and what it signified, I thought it magnificent. Since then the mouths of sham scholars and downright frauds has grown as loathsome as chewing gum scraped from the sole of your shoe when you get home it implies for that reason I consider it irreverent to apply the term to the delicate hearted and severely self-criti-

then I would pick up some particularly happy sentiment and urge her to try her hand at writing. She would invariably protest, either making fun of herself or downright indignant.

That last summer at Montauk, with my boy friend George Ruttkay, we sometimes ill temperedly bewailed our fate. She would say nothing. But the night she wrote to my wife in New York: "I swam today, even though the ocean was as angry as a co. shaken up out of George's and Molnar's ill temper."



Listening and learning was what she liked to do. She cultivated and argumentative company. She never interrupted. I often told her she was a professional listener. "Yesterday evening was the most wonderful in all my life," she told me one morning in New York. "I was at a party of Viennese refugees that I was invited to. They were arguing about music. When the argument was over, Bruno Walter sat down to the piano. He played Beethoven and Bach, at first for us, then obviously for himself. And I lived to sit by the piano, almost to touch him." (Her enthusiastic phrase, "the most wonderful evening in all my life" reminds me of her "most wonderful evening in all my life".)

autiful and most interesting woman in the world
(which I agree with her.)



She would not intervene in arguments about subjects
which she was well informed even when half-educated
windbags were completely distorting simple facts
she could have straightened it out with a word. But
that she had was far from the thing cocktail party
psychoanalysts call an inferiority complex. It was in-
stead a proud and defiant realization of the hopeless futility
of trying to make good in a few minutes' idle conver-
sation what universities had failed to do in years. It was
something that I had never observed before except
in old men.

"Why didn't you say something," I asked her once
when those ladies rattled off one idioecy after another
about Velasquez and Goya? You know the paintings
of the Prado better than those bridge playing dames know
the insides of their own handbags."

She answered me, wide eyed with wonder, "Why
not?"

ing she went to the university for her advanced class; every afternoon she would study the books from the Prado, which had been brought to Geneva owing to the dangers of the Spanish war.



The blanket of her deathbed lay the latest catalogue of Columbia University. She had wanted to perfect her English there. She spoke better English than I do. It was from her that I learned the fundamentals of English conversation. She often served as my interpreter, chiefly because she understood the fast talking New Yorkers better than I did. Americans—but Frenchmen too—when they discover from a foreigner's uncertain replies that they are not understood them, begin to talk louder, concluding that he must be hard of hearing.

"I am not deaf," Wanda used to say in such cases, smiling. "Please talk slower, not louder."

Wanda finally learned to understand fast American talk in Gloucester, Mass. I spent a few summer weeks there with Jaffe, Oscar Serlin, Mrs. Clarence Day, and a theatrical group. They were testing my play, *My Sister's Maid*, at the summer theater there. It tor-

(The play is about a poor, sick, seventy-year-old orthodox Jewish peddler who buys a sackful of old books at an auction. Back at home in his tumbledown and rooming-house, the barefoot servant girl pokes through the bag in search of novels. Through her he becomes acquainted with one little old book, the New Testament, and through the New Testament with Jesus. With his keen intelligence and with all his good heart he falls passionately in love with the Book and all with Jesus. Then, because he is some two thousand years late in following Him, he pays for this love with his life.—Almost twenty years before the German murder of the Jews, I wrote down the basic idea on a slip of paper in almost those very words. Four years before the horrors I started writing the play. After it had been written, rewritten, translated, retranslated, rehearsed, and given two tryouts, we all saw quite plainly, under the pressure of events rushing far more swiftly than we thought, that the play ought obviously to be shelved for good.



I have always regarded work as the best narcotic and the best anesthetic against every kind of worry. Even in the early years of my exile, worries about the fate of dear ones left behind in hate-torn countries

wherever—in Nice, Paris, Geneva, or here in New York—she found one that she knew I had not read (for she always knew every last thing about me), she would buy it and bring it home in triumph.

In just one field of art she was not particular. She adored everything to do with the theater. Once the lights went down and the curtain went up (I used to say in order to tease her), it made no difference to her what the play was, so long as a play was being acted.

I confess I was that way myself once upon a time. For instance, when I was at the theater in Paris I could never think like a critic for a single moment; I was always a groundling. I will go further: I have never left a theater in all my life with the feeling that I have wasted the evening. I have always left this sense of lofty superiority over the toiling and moiling actors and playwrights to a clique that is the same in every country, every language, and at every opening: the professional first-nighters.

Wanda saw one play eight times in succession, and other eleven times. She took an active part in rehearsals of my plays in Budapest, Vienna, and New York. She knew them literally by heart. She took an abundance of extremely useful notes at rehearsals. She would listen intensely, as if in a trance, to every word of

Max Reinhardt and Firmin Gémier doing it. Another thing that one finds only in people who have the theater in their very marrow—and it was perfectly natural in Wanda—is that they never grow weary of hearing the same scene repeated over and over at rehearsals.

"How can you stand it?" I asked her once after a scene that was then undergoing its sixth or perhaps seventh repetition.

"It's funny," she said, "but I always feel as if I were just hearing it for the first time."

I think this is the beginning of what might be called the quality of a real director.

Not long ago she wrote to her sisters in Budapest: "These four weeks of rehearsals have been the finest and most exciting time of my life. I give myself up completely to the sheer excitement of listening that I fall into bed at night dead tired."

She was surprised that even habitual theater-goers found it so hard to understand how actors can endure the endless repetitions, not only at rehearsals but even more when they have played the same part several hundred times. She could "understand it *so* well."

I told her that the question had often been asked of me—and, I suppose, of all playwrights and all actors—how can an actor stand those endless runs? I could answer the question to my own satisfaction, but the difficulty was to find a convincing explanation for an outsider. In the course of time, however, I actually discovered no good answers.

The blow-up came at a matinee. Csartos had a scene in which the maid ushered him into his sweetheart's drawing-room with, "Please have a seat; Madame will be here directly," and went off to fetch the lady. As the part required, Csartos sat down at the piano, on which a sheet of Chopin music lay out. To pass the time while he waited, his part called for him to play something by Chopin with great feeling, in the mood of a man in love. All this time he was alone on the stage. Csartos could not play the piano, and consequently, as is often the case, he only pretended, while a musician in the wings played for him.

At this memorable matinee Csartos got up in the middle of the Chopin piece, took the music off the piano, pulled another sheet from the music-rack, propped it up on the piano, sat down again, and went on "playing" Chopin. The musician behind the scenes, of course, could not stop any of this, and played on with impassioned fervor throughout the whole time, earning the biggest laugh in the history of that theater.

Needless to say, there was a tremendous row backstage and in the manager's office after the performance. "Tell us, what made you do it?" they asked Csartos.

"I hate lies," he said. "And an actor has to tell lies an hour every night; he doesn't say what he thinks, but what somebody else has thought. I can hardly stand

ently my nervous system won't stand that lie more than a hundred times without protest either."



Wanda dressed quite simply, scrupulously shunning the theatrical, yet most stage people in both Europe and America, particularly actors, even seeing her for the first time, took her for an actress. She never spoke a single word to me or anyone else that would indicate she had ever considered an acting career. Only now, too late, does it flash through my mind that perhaps the people who judged by first impressions were right. It is possible that she, always concealing her deepest wishes the most carefully, would after all have liked very much to be an actress, but she loved this carefully hidden longing so dearly that she would not for the world have betrayed it to me or anyone. If this be true, she took that secret along with her many other secrets to the grave—as she took to the grave also the many secrets of mine that I entrusted to her, and that I never told to another soul—because I have never in my life known anyone, either man or woman, who could keep a secret so perfectly and so passionately, as she.

y, and answering them was not hers, in all the fifty
years we spent together she never ceased to be an enigma
to my eyes. No matter how open she was, one felt that
behind her, without intending it, she still kept closed a
secret door to the unknown hiding places of her soul.
This is not sheer imagining on my part. Sometimes, when
one or another of these secret doors would open be-
fore me—but always through the chance remark of
some third person who had no idea why I was listening
intently to what he said. My wife, Edith, who was like
her sister to Wanda, and whom Wanda trusted, heard
more biographical details from Wanda than I did.
There is a tiny group of party-giving, champagne-y-
ing, playing, gossip-mongering actresses far apart from
the many thousands of honest, hard-working Huns-
tons who live in New York, but nevertheless want-
ingly called by naively gullible Americans "the Hun-
ton colony." Many members of this small group were
flushed, and even entertained one another with re-
marks, because the three of us—my wife Edith, Wanda,
and I used to take lunch together almost every day
at our accustomed little restaurant. In these restaurants
we never paid the slightest attention to the bill.

The nature of Wanda's relationship with Edith was
something I never understood. After Wanda's death
he would often say to Edith, "I trust I have your con-
fidence in a long life, and I have no doubt I shall be
a permanent guest here, but I get tired of being a

explain, a tender disguise for the time when I should die. "We'll live together," she said, "we'll take care of each other if we're sick, we'll always go everywhere together. . . . We'll be two old women, and if one of us tries to be ridiculous and dress younger than her age, the other will keep her from doing it."



Wanda was born in a small Hungarian town. Her father and her mother were both doctors. She married very young, and was divorced after six years. After the war—though only for a short time she thought she might become a millionaire. She had a fabulously rich uncle who had had a brilliant career as a banker in London and Vienna, and who brought up her and her brother, the latter murdered at Auschwitz. This uncle, her legal guardian, died. They believed that he had generously remembered in his will the two orphans whose guardian he was. But when the lawyers finally disentangled the legacy (complicated chiefly by German tax levies), Wanda got nothing.

She lost both parents early. To the very end her most prominent characteristic in my eyes was the fact that she was an orphan. She had an abhorrence of living alone.

who chose for this part failed her one after another chiefly because women who had been the soul of efficiency in Europe found themselves in America helpless and altogether at a loss. The upshot was that, growing old and of them, *she* would become *their* counsellor, the even-handed judge of their quarrels—in fact she bossed them.

During our European years together I enjoyed the ill-fated honor of having her put herself completely under my protection; she was fanatically obedient, trusting my judgment blindly. In the course of the years her confidence in me slowly began to be shaken, because slowly—very slowly indeed, owing to her reserve and modesty—began to discover her qualities of heart and mind, so that in the end it was I who always asked her advice about everything from playwriting down to getting a haircut. I never did anything at all during our American years without asking her opinion. Our partnership reversed, she became an orphan again; she had lost her protector, and I could tell that this made her very unhappy, because she knew she was never born a boss. She had no gift for directing other people's lives. The whole world tormented and exhausted her, and the responsibilities of life drove her almost to desperation.

me secretary, literary adviser, researcher, critic, editor, orator, assistant stage director, business manager, bookkeeper, stenographer, housekeeper, cook, and, in one person, Wanda (who looked a mere child) was already a divorced woman. When very rarely I ventured a question about her girlhood, or young married life, her usual reply was: "I don't look back." Or else: "Let's look to the future." Or else: "This is a new life; I shall have a short new one, quite different from the old. I don't know what it will be like, but I can hardly wait to see it." Or else: "I shall do all this with such sincerity, putting so much of my life in my future she insisted would be so short, that she broke me altogether of asking questions. She said to me—though my days are very easily spoiled by her remarks—that she would die young. She said it with conviction. She used to say it with the superiority of a person who has irrefutable proof of his strength and disdains to use it as evidence in a minor argument."

"I must hurry," she would say with a shrug, "my life is short, and I still want to see a great deal of the world—quickly—Paris, London, Rome, America, and the sea . . ."

An English lady whose acquaintance she made in Hungary invited her to London for the celebration of the

ights of Paris, she "got acquainted" with the city in three days. She never said a word about it beforehand, or to anyone. She dashed about from six a.m. to midnight, because her money for hotels and meals was calculated exactly to cover three days. Not for anything in the world would she ask help of anyone.

Her funds ran so low that on arriving in Budapest she had the porter paid by the taxi-driver, the taxi-driver by the janitor, and the janitor by her chambermaid, who afterward repaid with compound interest.

In the same way she "got acquainted" in three days from dawn to midnight every day—with Rome and Naples on her way from Budapest to New York.

"I must hurry . . . I have a great deal still to see . . . At her funeral this saying of hers kept going around my head as she was lowered into the earth, along with the "great deal" she had seen.



She worshipped the sun and the sea. At Montauk, Long Island, she always used to swim so far out to sea that her little white cap would dwindle among the fathoms, and the lifeguards would run excitedly up and down, whistling frantically for her to come back. When she came back, and she was measured from

Of one thing I am convinced, though without any but circumstantial evidence that her childhood was frustrated and unhappy.

Several months after our first chance meeting in Budapest restaurant, when she decided to accompany me abroad in my enforced, unplanned, and permanent homelessness, I felt that she was trying with all her strength to break away from the Budapest society that corresponds in a small way to New York rate society to lead a new and changed life. She knew whom she was going out into the wide world with. She knew she would be the traveling-companion of a man whom the new, hateful, central European tide had wounded to the heart and made shy of human contacts. I felt more and more that the most important of her new aims was not to polish her own taste through Western civilization, but above all to sacrifice herself in helping me as a writer and a human being.

Her help, at first childlike, then fraternal, finally took on in America (where I was sometimes sickly and always on the verge of complete despair owing to even

s almost as young as Wanda when she died. The words have made me realize that Wanda truly carried on where my mother left off—except that the child is fifty years older.

...

(Never since I have been in New York have I been alone with a doctor in an examining room. Often against my will, she went with me to examinations, for cardinals, and to the dentist. When I did succeed in persuading her not to come with me, I would hardly get into the dentist's chair before she would be knocking on the door and slipping noiselessly into a corner where she would sit there in the half-darkness of every doctor's office, watching keenly from start to finish, or when I had a novocaine injection she would start taking notes. Once, in fact twice, when I had to undergo a major operation, she would not allow the nurse to comfort me, but waited the surgeon herself.

One night in December of 1944, at two o'clock, death threatened my life. An unexpected heart attack, the first of my life, attacked me so fiercely that I could barely stir. I got to the telephone and pant, "I can't breathe . . ." She came to my side all the arrangements quickly and quietly. Within a few minutes she appeared in my room. She opened the window, and dashed me over, with all the strength

I cannot sufficiently emphasize that to this day I only half know who she was. I could see inside her only quizzically. Her nature was profoundly human, profoundly feminine, extraordinarily complicated. I could never discover why she so obstinately hid the human value within. She killed off her secret faults persistently, unflinchingly, indeed cruelly. And so her personality was truly enigmatic, yet irresistibly attractive. (In looks and bearing she tried to be anything but enigmatic. She strove for an almost exaggerated simplicity, but I always had a feeling that it was only a mask.)

The best I can do to communicate the impression she made on me in her lifetime is to cite a painting. Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of the wife of Zanobi del Giocondo, familiar under the name of *La Gioconda*, or the *Mona Lisa*. The unique smile dawning on that painted face seems to me the nearest approach, not to Wanda's outward appearance, but to her innermost personality. Once again I must say that portrait-painters will understand me best.

My search for details of her biography came to an automatic end, from what I must call my own vanity. The role she undertook was so flattering, did me such honor, and was even so invigorating to me in my broken state, that I altogether forgot every writer's indifference

e and we roamed half the globe like fugitives on the
ay to an unknown destination.

Only now am I beginning to realize that from the
ne we started our long journey I lived in Europe c
ff, in the truest sense of the word, from mankind. Now
e exaggerate a trifle, I might almost say it was a hy
otic trance that lasted for years; at all events it was
ie in a dream world, with the greatest hurricane of
me roaring immediately around me.

(My wife's brilliant stage career, tying her to Berl
ad Vienna, kept her almost constantly thousands
iles away from me. My only chance of spiritual su
val was to roam the Latin west.)

In this frightening and unhappy twilight of my care
lived in the life-giving company of what was for me
angel in nurse's garb. Wanda and I together fled t
roscription, prison, and murder that overtook so man
f my Hungarian and German friends. To her I owe t
ainlessness with which I was able to sever the bon
at tied me to humanity. Indeed it was not only pai
ss, it went almost unnoticed. This was all the easier b
ause we went from one strange city to another ev
ranger. For seven years in Austria, Italy, France and
witzerland, we had, you might say, no acquaintances
l. We were a lonely, taciturn, wandering couple
ains hotels, bistros, and sidewalk cafés

words; to me she became all of humanity and all of my generation, in place of the humanity and the generation that have so utterly disgraced themselves, from which I, once a social being, have fled in utter aversion. Europe it has grown beyond *misanthropy* in Moir's sense - not loving people to the *anthropophobia* Webster defines as "morbid dread of human society." No one with mental faculties intact can really distance himself from human society unless he has some regular person with whom he can take refuge.

During the first seven years of this period, we tried as much as possible to stay on the shores of the Mediterranean. This was easy, because those years marked the deepest economic depression on the Riviera. We had rooms in the big hotels for less than twenty per cent of the usual rates.

Only once did we spend any considerable time with each other. But only four months. I started from Geneva, on the thirty-first of December, 1939, for Sicily, feeling pretty desperate and with evil forebodings. By my request she left Geneva a day or two later to go home to Budapest, because I had decided to let it up to her where she would choose to live. Her mother and two sisters lived in Budapest. After all, no one in 1939 had the faintest idea what would happen

t the door of my New York hotel room. A minute later
he was taking my pulse. She did the same thing in the
same room seven years and four months after, the eve-
ning of the night she died.

CHAPTER 3

On the day of the funeral I was numbed with drugs. I had no hope whatever of any sedative from within, from my nerves or the working of my brain. Beyond doubt the help would have to come from outside, in chemical form. Early in the morning I took a capsule that some doctor the previous night had left to be taken just before the funeral because he found me too restless. But before ten o'clock when we had to go over to the funeral home, across from my hotel, I took a benzyl hexyl nitrite bottle. I was num-

icked car to the cemetery, and look on there w
nd little Wanda, at once a mother who knew all
ults and a grateful and obedient child while Wan
as laid in the earth.

The last time I saw her, at seven in the evening
ugust 27, five or six hours before her death, she w
med and healthy, while I was scribbling unimport
ters at my desk, she carried on a brief conversation
r room with Mrs. Ilus Folders, and then, when the l
e departed, with Mr. Ince, who had dropped in here
discuss the adaptation of a play of mine. He rushed
to a dinner party.

When Wanda telephoned to my wife Edith, about eight
e reported on the callers of the afternoon. She ex
I had been unjust to Mr. Ince in an attempt to
new adaptation. And so I had. Originally, Wan
I been very strongly on my side, but later, when
an to be unjust, she took Mr. Ince's part against m
After Mr. Ince left, I told Wanda she was doing with
friend and lawyer Dr. Fred Szabo, considered by m
many in 1944) had done for more than twenty years
would fight with fierce loyalty for any innocent in
sunt, but after the judgment had come in our favor
would whisper to me with a wink, "But in fact,
s the other fellow was right."

his remark did not please Wanda. I was glad to see
e forgotten this ruthless little racketeer ever since.

some forever impossible for me to tell her, repentant that she was right and I was wrong.

At the funeral home (where we had to go upstairs over the casket) I secretly swallowed another blue threonine sodium amytal capsule. I found I could still see and feel everything with intolerable sharpness, everything that I had never thought I should see or feel. My life for some fifteen years had been predicated on the natural and understandable assumption that I, thirty years her senior, would die first, not she, twenty-four. When I first met her, and scarcely looking older even now, two months before her thirty-ninth birthday.

By the time I reached the room where the casket stood in the funeral home, I was not seeing things clearly. People sat in rows of chairs—twenty, thirty, a small dining group. I could not pick out their faces. Beside me sat my wife Lili and my best friends in this country, George, Ernő, his wife Irene, and Ilus, Wanda's friend whom I have mentioned.

Lucie, Mrs. Mayer-Fuld, the other friend who loved me literally like her own daughter, was in Paris. Aside from me and Wanda's two sisters, Lucie was the one who lost the most by her death. Wanda's intelligence and friendship kept alive the spirits of Lucie and her husband as well in the blackest days, when they were fleeing from Berlin. In my pocket I clenched my hand

Through the veil of memory I see the priest stand-
the fog of my numbness, with the gold embroi-
stole around his neck. From where I sat I could
guess at the outline of Wanda's casket among the
rs. All I could actually see was a corner—if I am
remembering what I saw and what I did not see.
ember a tiny point of red light quivering among the
rs. Possibly it was a candle or a small electric bulb.
e time I really felt neither pain nor grief. I felt
ng at all but emptiness. I can only suppose I was
ng with my eyes open. I saw everything, but in-
y forgot it. I answered questions, but I remember
ore than that. Never for a second have I recalled a
question or answer. I also forgot immediately how
ot out of the funeral home and into the car, and
Wanda's casket was carried out of the building.
know is that I was determined to see them carrying
at and putting her in the car.
ce then, as I still live in the neighborhood, I have
passed by the funeral home. Several times I have
l by at noon, just as a flower-covered casket was
carried out and slid into Wanda's car. On these
ons I have always waited for the mourners to
ge, get into the first car, and dash after the hearse,
a has invariably set off at a pace that gave it a long
over the others, as if fleeing from them.

with friends. The black car moved, then rushed, and the driver turned and said something or other about a long detour to the cemetery today. This was because the great American Legion parade took place on the same day, August 30, and so the police closed off almost all of Fifth Avenue from morning till night. But somehow we had to get from west to east; hence the detour.

The traffic in town was tremendous. Hundreds of thousands of veterans had come in from out of town for the Legion Convention. The city, overcrowded enough anyway, was now filled to the bursting point with people and cars. I kept staring ahead among the swarming vehicles in search of the black car that was carrying Wanda with cruel swiftness into eternity. The fact that her car was moving at high speed I deduced from the rate at which ours was going, because ours was the first after hers. But nowhere did I catch sight of her elusive car among all the trucks and taxis. I began to be very uneasy. I was afraid that in the tangled traffic our car might somehow get ahead of hers, and so I should not be following but leading her to the cemetery. When this dismaying thought flashed through my mind, I felt almost as a physical sensation. It nearly roused me from the numbness brought on by the various sedatives. If it had been physical one would have called it a stabbing

flowers and one corner of kind Wanda's coffin. Though I had not touched alcohol for days, my numbness turned to a sort of drunkenness. I had noticed before that barbituric acid sedatives produced in me a sort of drunkenness that I felt somewhat resembled insanity. This had been their effect on me when I took too many before going to bed and then started up in fright during the night or got up too early in the morning—in other words, when I had not quite slept them out of my system.

I could feel my lips moving as if I were trying to talk, but I was only talking silently within. I was talking inside my brain. My poor foolish lips were obediently and automatically attempting what they had so long learned they ought to do when I talked.

"Where have you been all this time?" I asked Wanda mutely, frowning as I used to do when she came in late almost severely, reproachfully.

I thought I saw (to be exact, I forcibly tried to imagine) her face smiling as she lay with closed eyes in the coffin, her melancholy, ironical little smile, and answering: "I was trying to play hide-and-seek with you, but I can't help it if the driver suddenly brought my head of yours."

"Why did you hide?"

rain. I know perfectly well that my brain fabricated this conversation because I was longing for it.

The car hurried with her along the wide boulevard. Now I felt that it was racing like a gale or even an airplane. But our driver hurtled after it lest we be left behind. We took Wanda to the cemetery at tremendous speed. Possibly I exaggerated this speed then, and so do now. I grew up in Europe, where I followed the dead to the churchyard at a great many funerals. Everyone always went slowly, slower than slow. The horses that drew the hearse (perhaps they were trained to it) walked with slow and solemn tread. If there was a band it too moved at a preternaturally slow pace, playing the funeral march in a tempo that barely moved. In Paris when a funeral procession goes by, people pause on the sidewalks and wait with hats off until the dead unknown has passed by with slow solemnity.

Here we had to rush like a windstorm. There was no help for it, we were in a new world, in America.

I can understand this difference in the pace of a dead person's last journey: I know enough to explain it by the vast extent of the city and the stoppage that any slow procession would create in traffic, and so forth.

Nevertheless, and despite all logic, this hasty getting rid of the dead, this putting them quickly out of the

ing from the dead. The impulse is the same that keeps people lingering on a station platform or on the dock. To me this mad rush with the dead expresses the very opposite of that feeling. (A friend of mine, a heart specialist, tells me I am wrong: he says the anguish should not be prolonged.)

I stared through the back window of the black car. I could not make my lips stand still, though in the presence of others I was embarrassed at the way they continued to move, even when closed, as if saying something.

I asked Wanda a great many questions. She answered, "Don't excite yourself," she said. "You know you aren't allowed to excite yourself."

This is what I remember best, because I heard it from her hundreds upon hundreds of times in her life. One night a year before, when I was asleep, she fled from her room to a hospital, and had both feet operated on in the dawn, so that she could call me up when I awoke in the night, and tell me in a cheerful voice that the operation had been a success and that she was laughing and in fine spirits.

"Why did you arrange it like this?" I had stammered over the telephone.

"So that you wouldn't excite yourself. You know you

We knew Béla Bartók, the great Hungarian composer. One afternoon several people were in my room and suddenly I heard someone say, "When Bartók died..."

"What's this?" I jumped. "Bartók dead?"

(I make it a principle never to read the obituaries.)

"Five days ago," said the speaker.

When the guests left, I turned to Wanda. "Did you know Bartók was dead?" I asked.

"Of course—it was in the paper."

"Why didn't you tell me?" I said reproachfully.

"I saved you five days."

At ten o'clock one evening I was already in bed when she knocked and came in.

"I'm going to a gin rummy party."

"I don't like this card playing at night," I mumbled while reading the evening paper.

Not for months did I discover that she sat up till three at the bedside of a close friend of ours, a Hungarian lady who never discovered that the lady afterward told her of a certain... of... "What about that?"

th Street every moment she possibly could, and help
i nurse her. After the doctor gave the patient up f
t, Wanda hardly stirred from her bedside; she ev
ent the night there. Lili, in her despair, lay down
d beside her dying mother, embraced her, and warm
r emaciated, kind little mother with her own bo
wn to the final moment. So the three of them suffer
gether in a small room in 78th Street. The old la
d Wanda loved each other. Wanda helped Lili choo
coffin. Wanda spoke well of the Linden Hill Cem
ry where Lili's mother was buried. She said, "It's
autiful cemetery because it isn't too big, and loo
e a garden." (This was the cemetery where we bur
r, too, precisely because she had said that.)

I adjured her most strictly to tell me the exact ho
the funeral, because I would not for the world ha
en late in following Lili's mother on her last jour
Wanda came into my room the day before the c
hen I supposed the funeral was. She was dressed
ack and wearing dark glasses. (With her, dark glas
ways meant secretly tear stained eyes.) I knew eve
ing at a glance. They had buried Lili's mother witho
ling me.

"We've just come from there," she said. "Lili's ba
her apartment. Don't say a word. Don't excite yo

thing mechanically a hundred times over for how the child is to hold his table knife—believes in the good old educational theory that can teach proper behavior so well as hearing a constantly repeated.

As I have mentioned, in 1943, after a bout with I suffered a couple of heart attacks owing to muscle inflammation (myocarditis). For a while afterward I lay in an oxygen tent. Then eight months in bed with no tent. During those days I saw W. every waking moment. Never, either before or after, was her smile so reassuring as it was then. When she learned from the doctor that I was allowed to excite myself."

"That was why I hid in the car, so that you wouldn't excite yourself," she said now in Queens Boulevard, lying on her back in the coffin, smiling, with eyes closed and hands crossed, in the hurtling car. When I closed my eyes I could see her.

I was possessed then by the faint suspicion that I had some influence on the car and driver, and that in trying to spare me, she had not allowed her car to swerve into view; but later as well (and unfortunately I have since learned it is not a normal train of thought) I could not get this imagining from my mind. Months after

midly upon me that the hide-and-seek with the
as her kindness and care, surviving death, rather th
mere freak of the heavy traffic.

6

Even now it happens—less often of late—that my m
of fact way of thinking gets jumbled together w
fantasies of Wanda, woven since her death. Even th
Queens Boulevard, sick from the various chemica
ring about in my stomach and working confused
on my nerves, heart, and brain (digitalis, bromide,
specified capsule that I suspect contained ben
ine)—even then, unsoothed by all this, but only p
to a half-sleeping, half-crazy state, I began to hold
unforting fixed idea: that contact between us had r
used with her death, and that I need only stir mys
violently with pills that could be bought in dr
ores in order to be able to *talk with her, ask her qu
ms, and have her answer me.*

I would like to be very exact again, and give a t
port of myself. This was not a fixed idea in the m
d and psycho-pathological sense because, although
sisted constantly, I knew the idea had not forc

Explanation marks my case as pathological. I have not discussed it with doctors, and do not intend to. I would rather believe that this whole complex about talking with Vanda is the cruel play of a brain that I have constantly and forcibly trained for fifty-two years to contrive fictions, and then actually to accept these fictions as true and genuinely to believe in them. (It is a mania of mine that the audience of a fictional work will believe in it only if the author too did so while he was writing.) Fifty-two years is a long time. It is long enough for a violent nature to cripple the brain into abnormality. Not a scientist but a violinist told me that the molecules of a violin rearrange themselves in the wood when the violin has been long played. An engineer once told me that the molecule structure of the iron in a railroad bridge changes progressively as more and more trains run over it. This kind of work, which I have forced almost uninterruptedly upon my brain for half a century, partly owing to my constantly wavering confidence in my own capacities as a writer, partly through vanity (partly to make a living), has brought it about that my brain, being trained for spectacular performances, not for my tricks, can no longer react normally, particularly when it undergoes such a trauma as this. Even in spite of this it would immediately and unfailingly react to ever

I have just been trying to calculate how many times Wanda and I passed by the funeral home from which we went out with her on August 30; it is on our street, and we passed it certainly more than two thousand times—perhaps more than three thousand. I am superstitious every time the two of us went by, I turned my head the other way to avoid seeing either the door or the sign "Funeral Home." I know it annoyed Wanda ("You mustn't excite yourself"), but I could not break myself of this habit. Doctors call this a *compulsive act*; the cause of it is called a *compulsion neurosis*. This little nervous quirk of mine, one of many, has altogether disappeared. Now that Wanda has slept a night there, I am no longer afraid of the house. Quite the contrary. When I pass alone, my eye clings to the small door through which they took her in, and through which they carried her out. Sometimes the big black car with dark curtains over the windows, in which Wanda fled from me on August 30, is parked before the door. Now that old house seems friendlier to me than any other house in the world. Sometimes I glance unobtrusively into the big black car as it stands empty outside the building, waiting for a dead person, unknown to me, from whom, within doors, the priest and relatives are just taking leave upstairs.

Wanda made the idea of my own death, which had always filled me with horror, endurable to me.

CHAPTER 4

The door of my hotel room, opposite the window, is apparently loose on its hinges. Or even when closed it rattles slightly in any north wind. The sound is like someone outside giving two or three gentle knocks. It has happened before that about toward dawn, when one sleeps more lightly, I have started up at this apparent knock, crying out, "What is it?"

Then I would foggily remember the loose hinges and the sound of the wind.

ff, they produce, in my case, at least, a state that I like to call waking unconsciousness, but that might more truthfully and brutally be called near-madness.

One night I was startled from sleep by the above-mentioned soft knock on the door. I shouted in the direction, "Who is it?"

The knock was Wanda's of old when she would come in at five o'clock with the faultlessly typed pages of manuscript and letters, to make a little coffee on her hot-plate in the clothes-closet. I jumped out of bed. I remember I forgot in the dark to turn on the light. Gropping my way, I staggered toward the door. I asked too loudly, "Who is it?"

"Wanda," replied a soft voice, not from outside—now, I know—, but from my tormented brain. Yet it was her voice. Her shy, modest voice.

"What do you want?"

"To come in."

"You can't come in," I said.

"I went everywhere with you for fifteen years; I was always allowed to come in everywhere. Why can't I come in now?"

Her voice seemed to have a sort of tremor like that of a child with hurt feelings on the verge of tears. I said excitedly, "I'd be glad to let you in. Someone else won't allow you!"

ing my legs. I forcibly checked the beginnings of
bobbing fit.

"Who won't allow me in?" she asked indignantly.
"Me—to see you!"

I remember plainly that I wanted to answer, "Go."
And I remember, too, that I was afraid this word would
harm her, so that she would lose all hope.

"I don't know," I said.

After that she said nothing for a long time.

"Wanda!" I called.

No answer.

I was terrified lest, as so often in fifteen years,
I might have hurt her feelings without meaning to.
I opened the door, and took a step outside into the long
hotel corridor. It was empty clear to the end. Bright
light. All the lights were on.

I began to come out of my queer daze. I glanced
at my watch: half-past two. I looked down the bright
corridor again. Nobody, nobody. But by then I knew
I had looked down the corridor for nothing. Yet
it looked all the same.

This was the first time that Wanda came back and
I could talk to her.

CHAPTER 5

Next to my hotel room are a bathroom and a rather roomy closet. The closet is five feet wide and six feet long. In one of the corners next to the door, is a shelf, on which was a metal tray and Wanda's "coffee kitchen." The coffee kitchen consisted of four pieces: an electric hot plate, a white enamel saucepan, and two aluminum percolators for making of Italian Espresso coffee. Between bathroom and closet is a small vestibule, which opens into my room.

ould not wear it, as a "punishment" because she gave
to me for Christmas, although she knew that I have
morbid superstition about any present. Now I do wear
. Often even when there is no need of it.)

One night I woke up suddenly about two o'clock
and in my drugged stupor opened the door of the little
vestibule without turning on the light, in the full con-
fidence, born of a dream a few minutes before, that
I should find Wanda there. As long as she lived she spent
much time every day close to the coffee kitchen. She
boiled water, and poured coffee into cups and thermos
bottles. I often nervously upbraided her for this, al-
though she was making the coffee for me, my guests, and
my own next day's breakfast.

I opened the door. Wanda was standing there, in her
little straw hat with the black ribbon, which she had
once bought, heaven knows where, for \$1.05, and which
made such a hit that twice ladies came up to us in the
restaurant at lunch and asked Wanda in a whisper where
she had bought it. Both times she winked at me with her
melancholy little smile, but proudly all the same.

She stood there, startled, in the vestibule. Right
through her I could see the hat-tree with my hat, over-
coat, and the Bise muffler. Whether it makes sense or
not, she was not standing there. I knew then and I know
now that she was not standing there. But now, when I

I spoke to her as loudly and naturally as I could, as if I were speaking to a living person, like a man who knows the difference between life and death, like a man who knows the knowledge that she was dead, like a man who knows how to bring her to life by treating her exactly as if she were still alive. I knew what I was doing then and I know what I was doing as well as I know now. And still I did it.

I spoke gruffly to her: "Why haven't you been talking to me in all these days?"

She answered timidly: "Because I died."

"It isn't so!" I retorted in a fractious tone, not wanting to conceal the fact that her answer had hurt me. I didn't make coffee because you were too late.

I knew this was not true, any more than I knew that I was standing there, no matter how well my eyes were. I wanted to see her for a few fleeting seconds in the past. And I knew that I was blaming her unjustly. I wanted to be brutal to myself—I was deliberately perverting the true sense of the word because (so I felt) I absolutely needed the pain that I gave myself by snapping at her. Let the scientists solve the riddle if they can. My only purpose is to write accurately and intelligibly, to the best of my ability, what happened.

"I'm not lazy," she cried out, on the verge of tears. "I'm lying in the ground, and the lid of the coffin is fastened down. How could I have got out?"

"Very much," she said.

"Why did you hesitate so long to answer?" I asked. She made no reply. I was afraid. I dared not ask the question again. For one moment of terror it flashed through my head that possibly she might answer, "Because it's better there." I went on with my unjust reproaches.

"You could have got out," I said, "if you had but unlatched the lid of your coffin and pushed up the earth on top of it." She looked at me, frightened, with her big, luminous eyes. I cannot tell why, but ever since she died she has gazed at me with that frightened look. As if she were afraid I would reprimand her roughly for having let her go forever.



(As long as she lived she was always afraid of my reprimands and reproaches, because my profession had given me a larger vocabulary and more skill than she had in dramatic dialogue in argument. Usually during those fifteen years she made no answer if I reproached her. She did not want to be involved in a dispute with unequal weapons. She preferred to endure. She would say nothing, but would look at me sadly and nervously. This silence was a kind of martyrdom, because she had

Now, as she stood facing me in the vestibule, projected from my anguished brain as if from a film projector on a non-existent screen, now, as I upbraided her for not having broken open the lid of her coffin in the grave, even now she looked at me with the same calmness, the same uneasiness, and in silence.

"Why don't you answer?" I asked.

"I haven't the strength," she said.

"You haven't the strength for what?"

"The strength to break open the coffin and to lay all that mass of earth on top."

I carried on the conversation in bad faith and without conviction, simply so that we could go on talking; she would not disappear—not from before my eyes, but from my drug-plagued imagination, which with me took the place of what the alienists call hallucinations.

"You aren't telling the truth," I said. "You can break open the lid of the coffin. You can push up the yellow sand on top."

"I can't," she said.

"Comparatively speaking," I argued, "you're very strong from all that swimming in the ocean. It's p

whole coffee-making business is a mere trifle. But now that it has come to an end, all of a sudden the importance of it has grown simply tremendous. Stop gazing at me. I'm talking too much about coffee making, yes, yes. You're looking at me as if I were crazy. I'm not crazy. Your not coming back to make coffee hurts as much as . . . Well, I don't believe anything but cancer could hurt so much. Don't look so surprised. It isn't true that you *can't* come back. Why don't you admit that you don't *want* to come back? Not even for the little time it would take to make coffee!"

I was quite aware that I was accusing her not only unjustly but foolishly. May God forgive me this wickedness, if wickedness it was. Yet sometimes now I think I said all this in the dark of night in order to hurt her. To punish her for leaving me.

"That's vile!" she said, struggling with tears.

"What's vile?"

"What you said. It's unjust. It's not true that I don't want to come back. It's not true, it's not true. But I can't, I can't, I can't."



(One day here in New York, where I was far from

I gave away a great many articles that were in my room and on the shelves in the closet, things she used: blenders, plates, thermos bottles, cleaning materials, paper napkins, table silver, corkscrews, can-opener, and so forth—to her women friends so that I should never have to see the things again. But I felt a real compulsion to keep her coffee kitchen, which seemed to me the symbol of her tenderness, her sense of duty, her helpfulness; and besides, she was standing by it when the dialogue after her death took place between us. So I kept the hot-plate, the saucepan, the larger aluminum percolator (for guests), and the smaller coffee machine (for us two). The saucepan still stands on the cold hot-plate; in the saucepan now stands a flowerpot, in the flowerpot is earth brought back in my pocket from her grave, and planted in the earth is a climbing plant, whose broad green leaves cover the whole coffee kitchen. These metal vessels are now wired together underneath the green leaves. It all looks like a little aluminum grave marker overgrown with evergreen. When I see the group now, I feel I was right in thus transforming the kitchen instead of continuing to use it or giving it away along with the other things.

kind that Russians keep day and night before the picture of their dead parents.

Wanda's mother was Russian. She named her daughter after a legendary Polish queen who lived twelve hundred years ago and died young, throwing herself into the Vistula to avoid marrying the powerful German prince who had made war upon her and then during the war had asked for her hand.

CHAPTER

6

These nocturnal conversations with her in the narrow vestibule became a habit again in October of 1947. I was drinking heavily again. Although for three years and a half I had stopped drinking altogether on doctor's orders. Now I would start at five in the afternoon, because this was when the most frantic part of my day began. That was when I missed her most: she had always knocked at my door at the stroke of five, which was the beginning of what we called her "office hours." I would keep on drinking

During this time I used to wake up automatically between two and three at night, go into the closet, and take a look at the coffee kitchen (which by then was already transformed into a miniature aluminum cemetery). The weak bulb on the closet ceiling goes on automatically when you open the door. But when the peephole was lit up in this way, I would not see Wanda beside the coffee kitchen. So when I was in there I had to shut the door from inside.

That put the light out, and I would begin talking in the dark. I knew it was not spiritualism, nor self hypnosis either, nor a desire to produce supernatural phenomena. I knew it was deliberate play acting for my own benefit, which I could not carry out except under the influence of a sort of barbituric poisoning. I did this because it would hurt, and so that pain would bring back Wanda into my life in some form, if just for a fleeting moment. I asked questions of her, and I answered in her stead. I asked loudly, and answered very softly for her. Her answers were either those that I thought she would have given if she had been alive now, or faded scraps of conversations with me or her women friends. Or else they were things that I felt she would have said if the spiritualists had been right and the dead could have spoken to the living. But mostly what she said was

assuring smile. Now I ask you, why did you let me do that?"

(The oxygen tent in 1943 was over the bed, which had been pushed into the middle of the room. My wife, Li and Wanda kept watch in my room, relieving each other every three hours. The nurses, night nurse and day nurse, would sit in an armchair in a corner.)

"What were you looking at?" I asked.

"I was looking to see if you were still alive, because everything had been frighteningly quiet in the oxygen tent for a long time."

"What would you have done if you'd seen I was dead?"

"I'd have killed myself."

(She actually did say this once, after I recovered. Now in the closet I merely reproduced the actual conversation, undoubtedly because I wanted to hear it over and over again.)

I upbraided her for this answer, just as I had done before, when she actually said it.

"It's very easy to say a thing like that," I declared. "It isn't worthy of your intelligence, nor of mine, to say such things to each other."

"Tell me," she asked, "but think a while before you answer, what business have I in the world if you die?"

ese conversations strengthened my resolve to follow the advice of one of my few real American friends, Jaffe. Sam knew and was fond of Wanda. He told her as if she had been his younger sister. On the other hand, Sam was the only one of my Americans for whom Wanda developed a real affection.

It's beautiful, young, gifted, and dearly beloved had died six years before. I never knew or saw his wife. I only heard from others the story of this beautiful marriage, the young wife's tragic and untimely death, and the effect of her death on Sam. Sam had not been in the habit of talking to me about it. Now he talked to me every day, and, you might say, tried to teach me how to stand up under the agony of bereave-

"There's no method in your suffering," he said. "It's not right. You loved Wanda like your child. You should sit down with Wanda's memory some day and have a friendly discussion, and make a deal with her. Don't pay any attention to the people who tell you that time heals all wounds. It's not true. Either a person has loved somebody, or he hasn't. If he has loved her, there's enough time in all eternity to heal the wound. I've

phonograph. And I listen to my wife's beautiful voice singing the world's loveliest songs to me."

He smiled as he spoke with his sweet, rapt smile, which there seemed to be neither sadness, merriment, or irony, but only serene resignation.

I took his advice. I reached an agreement with Wanda's memory and with myself that Wanda was to go on living for me. She would lead a faint, dim, and doubtful trance life, but she was to live. With all memory-teller's skill, in turn, I was to make her living memory more and more vivid with passing time. Though my friends kept saying, "Get away from here"; "Go to a new atmosphere"; "Live in new surroundings"; "Don't bury yourself in your bereavement"; "You must concentrate your mind on work and more work!"; "You shouldn't be alone, you should look for company"; "Company!"; and above all, "You have to go on living"; and "Life goes on,"—in spite of all this sage advice, I made my agreement with Wanda that henceforth we would meet more often beside the coffee kitchen.

I write the word "agreement." This is not the truth. It is the habitual and unintended lie of the story-teller, forever deceiving himself. I forced this "agreement" upon the two of us: it was a lie told to myself. If she were able now to give me her advice, she would unquestionably disapprove, and would say exactly what my friends

bing, physical pain that was always the result. I did not first prepare myself to see it. We decided that the same thing applies to this word that I said of "agony" that it should never happen again. We would not speak by day as well as by night, and right beside the workshop. Whether it hurt or not. And we would speak but not as we had done hitherto, I aloud and you in my voice, but both of us silently. As I said in our few previous conversations had been silent before, after, and sometimes even during, these conversations out loud, I had a feeling that I had become understood. With my faulty and superficial knowledge of medicine I believe that a shock may produce a nervous breakdown—a neurosis accompanied, as in my case, by hysterical symptoms—but never insanity. Yet perhaps because my knowledge of medicine is faulty, I think this must still remain a controversial subject.



These last few days I have been thinking a great deal about a man I knew but slightly, a talented composer whose operettas were successfully performed before the war in all the capitals of Europe. He was a rich and universally popular man; recently taken from the hotel where he lived in poverty.

that he has never lived in such a magnificent hotel as this. Sometimes, his visitors say, his eyes sadden briefly, but only for an instant. Otherwise he radiates happiness and contentment. I heard about him a few days after my mother's funeral, in September of 1947, and I found myself envying him. Today, as I write these lines (November 22, 1947), I envy him again — or still.



The subsequent conversations took place in silence, but always next to the coffee kitchen, her grave-marker. The feeling got a grip on me that I was closest to her here, beside this monument to her helpfulness and motherly solicitude — beside this monument, which might strike others as sentimental to the point of ludicrousness. I knew this corner of the closet had served not merely for coffee making but for secret whisperings with mother and friends in order to spare my nerves: I had noticed, English and otherwise, that must be kept from me, or perhaps destroyed, orders my doctor gave to my mother after she asked him not to tell me things directly, but to let her filter them to me gradually, like a member of the family who dreads to upset the hypochondriacal man. Here I am very close to her, in that corner

to plates and tumblers (washed many hundreds of times), below those built-in shelves, on which are stacked thousands upon thousands of typewritten pages in big file boxes—plays, stories, novels, letters—all of which she worked day and night to type, correct, often suggest, and which she criticized, always honestly but always with a mother's solicitude.

There is one place in this world where I feel even closer to her. That is by her grave in the Linden Hill Cemetery in Brooklyn, Grave 28, Map 1-C, Row 19. I wrote this address, during the irresponsible restlessness of the first few days, in the book where I kept my more often needed addresses, along with all the other addresses—friends, lawyers, agents, and so forth. As if it had been a residence address. Afterward, I was going to tear out that page, because when I was looking up another address my eyes would be riveted to her name and I could not go on looking, or if I did, I would keep coming back to this page and staring at it fixedly.

Now, later, I excuse my foolishness in writing the dead Wanda's exact address in my address book by telling myself that even in those first days it expressed my idea that I should still number her among my living friends. A friend who has simply moved to a new address.

I bought the book in Berlin in 1926 and have kept it

re died, because I never cross out anyone's name from the book merely on that account. The book allows me to follow the last great migration of these persecuted artists, now at rest in the cemeteries of five continents. I suspect one of Wanda's women acquaintances having crossed her name and telephone number off the address playing list when she died. Certainly I am wrong in representing this, if only within myself, but nevertheless I did resent it at the time, and I resent it still. Wanda might have said that even my imagination revealed injustices. Leafing through the old book, I sometimes remember the saying (who said it I do not know) that says: "Mankind consists of two groups: living and dead, the dead being in the majority." More and more I am coming to believe not merely that the dead are in the majority, but that there are disproportionately more of the good among the dead than among the living, particularly now, in the continuing paroxysm of human wickedness. And now there are still more good people here, since kind Wanda has joined them. Kind Wanda never set foot in a hairdresser's for two and a half years, but secretly washed her hair at night under the sheet in the basin, because, though she had money for good packages, she would take the extra few dollars for the grocer instead of to the hairdresser. She packed

because she felt—and said—“I’d be stealing those dollars and cents from my dears in distress.”



She was the most Christian Christian I ever met in any life: a Christian in the sense of the Sermon on the Mount. Not that she went to church—though, now that I am writing it down, I hesitate to state this for a fact—it is possible that she also went to church in secret. No one knew those of her secrets that she really cherished. She was grateful to me that I broke myself in good time of putting questions to her. She had an abhorrence of communicating her innermost thoughts and deepest feelings to anyone. People who thought she “told them everything” never got but a tiny fraction of the things that she might perfectly well have told. Of this I have proof.



One more trait in this character study patched together at random by an amateur biographer. Private property was sacred to her only when it belonged to someone else. She knew no such impulse as clinging to her own property—money, valuables, better clothes, simple jewelry. Her dearest possessions—even the ones

joy them." For her the fact that an inanimate object belonged to her had no significance. Possibly a professional biographer would skip this, but I insist on noting it. I do not believe there has ever been anyone in the world who lent out so many umbrellas during sudden downpours, and got so few back, as Wanda. Similar to her women friends, surprised by bad weather, carried away her scarves, overcoats, and galoshes, all which went past recovery. She was famous among her acquaintances for never asking for anything back. Not umbrellas, not lent money.

She was the most generous specimen of that race who instantly replies to the remark, "My, that's a pretty cigarette case you have", or "a pretty belt", with "But it's yours" and she bade the case or the belt goodbye forever, even though she had been fond of it. Nobody, friend or beggar, ever asked money of her without getting it. Her friends had not even to ask for whatever extra money she had, she would actually give upon friends, who, for instance, sighed mournfully in front of a show window over a hat or handbag they could not afford. As for herself, when she wore a hat at all she would buy the best looking among the very cheap ones. Her handbag was so worn that I used to complain about it to her because all her small things

ore passionately than anyone else. I cannot refrain from giving a brief conversation back in Budapest that had about this quality in her: her blind, unshakable loyalty, ready to go through fire and water for friends and loved ones. She said, "It's an animal quality in me because I can be as faithful as a faithful dog." I told her *mea culpa* that Alfred Brehm, the German zoologist whose world-famous encyclopedic *Lehrbuch* (of its animals) used in my boyhood to be called the animal bible, and whom you could not exactly call a dog lover, said the dog is not faithful to his master out of gratitude and because he considers himself his master's property. But quite the opposite, the dog considers his master his very own property, and clings to him for that reason. If that's true," said Wanda, "then it's much finer and more unselfish than if the dog were grateful to his master for food."

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One more tiny recollection of her, which a professional biographer might have left out as negligible, and which I in my oversensitive state undoubtedly thought too much of, and highlight too strongly. A friend of hers, a young lady, went away from New York for

for other people—that, in the true sense of the word, loved her. Every day she told me some new story about the bird.

Months passed; the friend returned, and one day came and took the canary away. Wanda never said a word, but I knew she missed the bird sorely. I was so sure of that I offered to take her straight to a pet shop and buy her a canary. She said, "I don't want that. I love that particular bird."

This cannot, I feel, be called an adult story. But among my memories—including the bloody stories of two world wars and three Hungarian revolutions—the child's tale stays alive, bearing the title, "The Fidelity of the Human Heart." And the question stays alive, too, forever and with no reply: What was a human being with such almost incredibly sensitive feelings doing at such a time as this in the world, when millions of innocent Jews and Christians (among them her brother) were ruthlessly put on the rack and then slaughtered, while the humanity numbered in hundreds of millions sat by with folded arms, like an audience at a show?

As I write this, I almost feel that nowadays, "in our modern world of mass-observation," as James Hilton put it—when, to the sorrow of poets and the joy of politicians, most of this world's fiction-writers (as the late Gal

But it is my set purpose to write down quite without self-censorship everything about her that occurs to me. I have a desire (at the risk of being called in old dotards) to write down the most insignificant details about the best pupil of Jesus, who truly followed His commandment that if any man will come after Him, let him deny himself and take up his cross, even greater than mine. I desire to be a fashionable writer of profound best-selling messages or books preaching eternal sociological or economico-political truths that die next month. In Greek, Latin, and Hebrew there are notes much more insignificant than mine upon good people that have not gone out of date even in tens of centuries.

(1)

My wife Lili and I had a good deal of discussion about ways and means of assuring Wanda a few years free from worry in case I should die, because she took absolutely no thought for her own future. At first, we thought of adopting her, but we gave up that idea. Instead, we both had a lawyer draw up a document providing that if she should outlive either or both of us, her living would be provided for, and she would have a bit more besides to invest in something.

I her what I considered the most beautiful and profound story in all world literature. It is from Ovid, in my opinion the greatest Roman poet and the nearest to my heart, perhaps because he himself was an exile: he wrote two thousand years ago the songs of sorrow even for the exiled "literati" of today.) It is the story of Philemon and Baucis. Ovid wrote this legend just about the time Jesus was born. It appears in his *Metamorphoses*. Philemon and Baucis, a Phrygian married couple, gave food and shelter to several gods who were roaming Phrygia as poor, simple wanderers. Jupiter rewarded them by promising to grant them one wish. The two, loving each other dearly, asked to die at just the same time. And so it happened.

This timeless story is the basis of my oft repeated comment that the awful part of life is not for people who hate each other to kill each other, but for people who love each other to die at different times.

CHAP

A conversation with her, months after her death, t
down that very night.

"Tell me, why did they dig me out of my
and put me in four coffins?"

"They didn't touch you. We buried you
fins on Saturday morning, August 30. Yo
smiling expression, closed eyes, and cross
one coffin while the undertaker's employ

Outside Casket Box.' It was in those two coffins they buried you, in the loose, yellow, sandy earth. The two coffins were taken up in October, and put into two further receptacles. And the four were lowered into the grave again, dearest."

"Why did they do that?"

"I gave orders to do it."

"Why?"

"When I leave here I want to take you with me. Not until weeks after the funeral did they tell me that I couldn't take you away without legal permits from the authorities, and that the whole matter was very strictly regulated. Coffins intended for transportation must have a metal lining. Your third coffin, the new one, is called 'Metal Zinc-Lined Outer Case.' Well, to keep the damp earth, rain, and frost from corroding this metal lining I followed the advice of experts, and had the three coffins cemented into a big concrete box. The technical cemetery term for that is a 'Concrete Vault.' When I want to take you away in the three coffins, the concrete vault will be broken open and left behind. It will stand there like a bed someone has slept in a long time, but has arisen and gone away."

"You want to take me away?"

"Yes."

loved. Southern France, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Cannes, for instance. Or to simplify, Villefranche, which you used to be so fond of more than of Cannes or Nice."

(The memories came flashing across my mind like movie montages.)

"Do you remember," I asked, "the American ship *Omaha*, which was stationed all one winter in the bay off Villefranche, and whose skipper we saw so often we could even recognize him in civilian clothes on the bus? We never knew him personally, but you told me, 'There's that nice captain of the *Omaha*.' We had other such 'acquaintances'; we called them *friends by sight*. But maybe we won't go there now. Let's go to San Remo in Italy. San Remo, because I once watched you from my fourth-floor hotel window. You went off through the hotel garden early in the morning and saw you stop before a mimosa bush when the white blossoms (it was near Christmas), glance back over your shoulder to make sure no one was looking, embrace the bush, and go on.

("When you stopped, I thought you were looking around timidly because you wanted to be sure of the branch.)

"Or we may go to Ospedaletti, that little

The January sun shone as warmly as in summer. Remember?

"We sat there until the sun set, over a bottle of Chianti. We were discussing my new play, *Delilah*, which I was working on at the time. Night after night you kept reading and rereading the manuscript, writing down all your remarks, and in Ospedaletti you'd discuss them with me."

(Or I would read aloud to her a few changes that I had made the night before, which she would criticize in her loving and acute way. Her critical method was characterized by the following oft repeated conversation, after I had read out something new and caught a dubious look in her eye: "Is that joke weak?" I would say . . . "No." . . . "Shall I kill it?" . . . "Yes.")

"Remember with me now how from our table we could see a whole hillside thickly covered with pink and red carnations. Scattered as if upon a red and pink carpet stretching into infinity were the bright yellow spots of the mimosa trees. In Ospedaletti remember me of our 'friends by sight' sometimes sat at a neighboring table. Alphonso XIII, King of Spain. There were many Spanish royalist émigrés on Italian soil in this region between San Remo and Ventimiglia. The Spaniards, publicans, who had no liking for Mussolini's territory."

life to his own, in four or five different countries, often in the same hotels, and meeting him for years in the same restaurants."

(We did not care about the Spanish king's political views. But as human beings we could feel for him. A stranger and tremendously rich man though he was, because behind his smile we could see that he was eating out his heart in frustration, sorrow, and bitterness, just as we were, while our gaze moved serenely over the carnation fields, flaming at sundown in every shade of red and pink.)

"But when I think about its being up to me," I went on, "where I go to die, I usually think of Venice. That's where I've been happiest and also unhappiest in my troublous life. There's a ship that runs from New York straight to Venice. They'll say, 'A foolish old man with a small coffin is traveling on that ship.'"

"Small coffin?"

"It is small, dearest. When the priest was praying and I caught sight of the outline among the flowers, it came to the heart to see how small it was. I was reminded that you never liked to have people say you were small. And you were right. As long as you were alive you weren't small. But dead, dearest, you were heartbreakingly little. Like a schoolgirl."

er, nor her smile either. But I knew—or I only thought
that she was smiling at me.)

"I was wondering," she said, "whether you were
start by the idea of digging me out of the ground and
burying me again, and so disturbing my deep peace,
which you know better than anyone else I desired
and so intensely."

"Yes, it did hurt. But I couldn't stand the thought
which troubled me day and night for weeks after your
death, that if I should ever have to leave America
I should be leaving you here alone. Let me remind you
of the true story you found among my old things, about
a very old, tall, thin gentleman who stayed behind in
the little Transylvanian city of Szászrégen, from which
our army had evacuated the civilian population, under
bombardment from the Roumanians in the First World
War. The old man I met one night in a gloomy, bare
café when I was a war correspondent. He wore white
read gloves. He was the only patron, off in a corner
with a bottle of wine. When I asked him why he stayed
when the whole population had fled, he said that
unless he was carried off by force he would never leave
the bombarded city, because he did not want to leave
nobody alone in the cemetery."

"Where would you want to take me to?"

the Grand Canal in a gondola, we looked up in awe at the houses where Robert Browning and Richard Wagner died. The most glorious building in Venice is built over a grave. Really it's a gigantic grave marker. St. Mark's Church, built over the grave of Mark the evangelist. Venice is not a city of life. It's as dead as the silent and as beautiful as the moon. But the dead and most silent part of it is the cemetery. The cemetery we used to see so often in the midst of the mirrorlike great lagoon. That mysterious island between Venice and Murano, the village of the glass blowers. Often our eyes would roam over the island, on which is nothing but the cemetery, as we glided past in a gondola or *vaporetto*. When we came to the Fratelli Toso glass house to buy knick-knacks. Remember the small glass cigarette container sprinkled with gold powder. "What you picked out?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Is it still around somewhere?"

"It was lost with all the rest of my things when Budapest was bombed and looted."

"From outside, the cemetery island looked like military works. Like a fortress. High, thick, brick walls surrounded it, brick walls that seemed to grow out of the water. Inside the wall, cypresses peered over across

er way, out of superstition. But I always used to lo
through the open church portal, and used to see t
ers burning in the darkness inside."

"I'm going to buy two plots in that cemetery," I sa
takes a lot of preliminaries. A permit to lea
merica. A permit to enter Italy. For you and for m
t's talk now about where we're to sleep the gro
ep. Let's talk about where we're going to stay.
e to come to a decision about it. I'm told it'll be ve
ed to get your two permits. Particularly the one y
ed to get into Italy with. The American passpo
u were so proud of is no good now, dearest. A
u won't be able to smile sweetly at the consuls now
u did for all those years, so sweetly that they alwa
ve you a visa on the spot, for anywhere. But in the e
e'll fight our way through, both of us, through la
rs, consuls, government offices, shipping compan
dertakers, cemetery superintendents, through all c
cles. And then, that last humiliating struggle behi
we shall sleep there after all, with closed eyes, fina
peace with this terrible world. And with our go
u with your kind Jesus, I with my God of Vengean
e'll sleep side by side, the two of us, millions a
illions of years."

"No."

"I want to be alone."

"Don't say that."

Softly, but with unyielding stubbornness that led one to feel she would never change her mind, she said, "I want to lie alone in the earth."

"On the island in Venice?"

"Yes, there."

"How about me?"

"You too, but not beside me."

"Near you?"

"Yes. But not beside me."

"Why?"

"I want to be alone."

"Forever?"

"Forever."

"Are you going to be so unfeeling that you won't even feel how much I shall resent not being right next to you?"

"Yes, I shall feel it."

"Will it hurt you?"

"Very much."

"And still you want to lie alone there under the cypresses? Why?"

"I don't know where they buried my brother, or, if they burned him, where the Germans scattered his ash-

"Yes."

"Much fonder?"

"Naturally. And since they murdered him, I've loved him even more. Don't worry your head about it. There's nothing to be done about that. Just let me lie alone no matter whether it's where I am now or on the island in Venice. Between two strangers."

(I mentioned before the materials from which my imagination assembled these conversations. Shall I confess here that I once actually heard the most essential part of this conversation from her own lips, though not exactly in these words?)

6

I stood there, silent.

"Now don't cry," she said. "You ought to be ashamed. In two months you'll be seventy years old. And you cry? Why, since I've died, it's even happened that you couldn't control yourself when the talk was about me in the presence of other people. That's awful. Can't you restrain yourself? Lots of people would take it and say you have no right to upset other people. You give other people an embarrassing and unpleasant time. The people you know are astonished. A comedy writer, a wit, she

to look at the symptoms. They'll leave you alone altogether."

"I know, dearest. But I've changed since you died. I'm like a broken mechanical toy that the children have tried to fix up, but failed, and have thrown in the ash can, and are looking for some new toy."

"That's not only weakness," she said, "it's insulting to other people to give in to pain so openly. That's something I never did. Though I had a weaker system than you. And I've cried more than you. But only when I was alone. At home in my room. Or at Montauk, lying on my face in the sand of the beach far away from everyone else, where no one could see my face. Or on the street in New York, where it's so easy to be alone on the street, when bitterness overcame me and I put on my dark glasses, which nobody could see through."

"Nobody except me."

"Not even you. You only *knew* I was crying, silently with face unmoved, behind my dark glasses. And I learned to keep my mouth from quivering or twisting. By long practice, I learned to discipline my eyes and mouth. People in New York have no idea how many hundreds of such Europeans they meet every day among the Fifth Avenue crowds. They're all practiced non-criers. They've all made an art of keeping the body independent of the agony of the soul. They're all men

ok. I know those show-window gazers. I used to be, but I managed to break myself even of that. I discovered that I mustn't do that, once when I caught myself staring for minutes on end at a perfectly commonplace piano that didn't interest me in the least, on 5th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. A man beside me began to stare at the piano simply because he couldn't understand why I should look at it for so long. Take the son from me."

"I'll try, dearest."

(Is not this dialogue too an echo of words really spoken in 5th Street before the show window of a picture gallery?)

Around the middle of October they raised the coffins from the grave. The one she sleeps in, the regular one. The one inside the cypress casket. They put the two, just as they were, into the regular metal lined casket, which was soldered, and ready, necessary, for overseas transport. These three coffins were put in the aforementioned Concrete Vault, and the four caskets were lowered into the grave. By her birthday, November 1, 1942, she was sleeping enclosed

salute from all of us who loved her—by no means a commonplace. But any great anguish takes its first in commonplaces, and anyway this in a foreign tongue is addressed not to those who are to pass by the stone, but to her who sleeps.

The entire process of disinterment and reburial was arranged by a helpful old gentleman, now deceased, named William J. Solomon. On the fifteenth of May he informed me by letter that everything was arranged as I wished it. The following day, my wife read in the papers that Mr. William J. Solomon died.



This obsessive concern, amounting almost to a preoccupation with the fate of the bodies of the beloved dead, is as mankind itself. There is ample evidence of it in Egyptian, Jewish, and Roman graves and burial customs. Yet there is in English a word, "Ghoulis," meaning I know perfectly well, but which has been seen misused, under pretext of worshipping the dead, to deride but actually to denounce the cult of the dead. I still profess myself a staunch follower of the cult because several thousand years old—old-fashioned.

tions, whose original meanings have been twisted and perverted for various propaganda purposes. They are rendered easily accessible, indeed downright attractive, to the wicked and the stupid, and they are used by both classes. Such words have become linguistic parasites. They cheer, ease, and sweeten for stupid and ignorant people the ever more painful exertions of life. All this applies likewise to such words as "hypochondriac," "maudlin," which are used and misused especially and generally by slogan-lovers of mediocre intelligence. They feel that they have risen to a higher level of culture when they see or read manifestations of human suffering, and they carelessly lay about them with these adjectives, without regard of the true meaning of the words. But they are also misused by some intelligent people, either to get off their disease—nowadays fashionable and usually simulated—of unfeelingness, or else to make someone ridiculous.)



I heard the first ironical, disapproving expression of this feeling of mine when I was a war correspondent in Austrian Galicia, just before Christmas of 1914, on a battlefield near the village of Limanova, after a decisive battle between Russian infantry and Hungarian hussars. The fallen Hungarian hussars

A Tyrolean captain of gendarmes called me down. "Why don't you stay home? This is just routine. There's a shortage of boots and leather. And money's money." He walked away, but looked over his shoulder, and pointed at the people who were heaving the dead soldier into the deep pit. "And war's war," he said. I was only thirty-six at the time, and I was sure he was right.

Although I have no need of it, in February of 1948 I did happen to come upon printed evidence that I am now one in my obsession. In the Cleveland Hungarian-language daily *Szabadság* (*Liberty*) I read the following brief item:

Farmington, Maine.—Public health authorities were forced to intervene on discovering that Mrs. . . . (the name was given) was keeping the coffin containing her son's body in her living-room. Mrs. . . . 's son had been killed three years before in France, and the army had returned the body to the mother. Mrs. . . . explained that the coffin was hermetically sealed, and she had not been able to bring herself to bury it before spring came. . .

What this woman did with her son's body is really what the Hungarian nation had done with the sole remaining part of the body of its first Christian king, St. Stephen, who died in 1038 A.D.: his shriveled right hand. The hand was not buried, but is borne in state in a glass case through



Reading this manuscript over and over again, I began to remember dimly when my extraordinarily deep-seated and of late so agonizing interest in the further destiny of the bodies of the beloved dead first took hold of me. One of his books, *L'Enfer*, the French novelist Henri B. de Saint-Martin described in pitiless and unforgettable detail everything that happens to a body of a dead man from the moment when he is buried to the time when he is no more than a handful of gray dust. It was these pages from a literary work I had read in my youth, perfect alike as science and as literature, that had so thoroughly and permanently affected my imagination on that subject. I am paying dearly now for what was once no more than an instructive and gruesomely fascinating tale.



As I said before, the climbing plant, bought from a corner florist, in both of the flowerpots that keep her memory green, is planted in earth that I brought from her grave. The leaves of these plants had previously fed and flourished on other soil. I merely transplanted them into the new earth, where they continue to thrive. In one of the pots, however, I noticed early in October that a tiny, delicate shoot was timidly sprouting from the earth. The

From the first moment of its existence this new
forth its hair-like capillary roots, and since then
living on the moisture in the same soil where
is turning to dust. According to the indubitable
of physics, chemistry, and biology, this tiny
plant embodies some infinitesimal parts of the
being, and so they live on.

CHAPTER 8

Into this earth, in a handful of which the plants now vegetate, they put along with her, on August 30, 1947, her memories of the interesting and prominent personages whom she saw on the shores of the Mediterranean and here in New York, and of whom, or rather of having seen whom, she was so proud. She was anything but a snob pluming herself on her acquaintance. To only one woman friend in Budapest did she write about such "events," and occasionally to her family.

never even have occurred to her. Nor was she ever asked for autographs or pictures. (Though I know from the following what a collection she would have begged if she had chosen.)

The most she ever did, when people came to see her, was to creep away in excited delight to her kitchen, make cups of fragrant coffee for them, and then watch anxiously to see whether they enjoyed it.

Most of the information about these encounters came to her childhood friend, in tremendously long and spaced detailed letters, after she had taken out of her book a few words about any encounter that seemed memorable, lest she forget something when she wrote. The first page of this notebook bore the heading "To be written to Budapest." Then came immemorial dates, and a mass of telegraphic notes in her characteristic scopic writing. I recount and supplement these here. I write down also many of her reminiscences here from memory, not in chronological order, as they occur to me.

These are stories that she used to tell in a gathering of our New York friends in her characteristic reminiscent stage. "Tell the story about R.," she would say, or "the one about *Vanity Fair*," and in reply, "No, you tell it," and would delight

because they contain tiny fragments of a life story, a now, however sketchily, the details of our peculiar, restless expatriate existence, always on the move. I have tried here to recall the very words in which I have heard all them. Some of them I have condensed, some others have supplemented with my own memories.

Humbly, like the infinitesimal grass blades from earth, the following scattered bits of her past life sprout; I must point out that most of them come from before the war, and practically all from the time before she discovered the horrors that were visited upon her family and loved so well.

One further criticism of these remarks: some of them are simply-worded over-statements concerning people and events. But in her humility and humanity she loved practically everyone living. (Hence my earlier remark about her Christianity.)

Here are a few from France and Italy.

“We were in Paris for a few days to hurry up *Mon Carte d'Identité*. I improved the occasion to attend a classical matinee at the Comédie Française. Traditional audiences at these shows get eight acts: one three-act and one five-act play. On M's advice I went out during the intermission into the famous *Foyer*, where the au-

was something else I was determined to see. I asked for advice, but in this I failed. M. told me that in 1888 Paul Fort, who bore the title *Prince des Poètes*, had roughly corresponds to the British Poet Laureate. I took him up to the managerial offices of the Comédie-Française to introduce him to Émile Fabre, the Administrateur Général (general manager) of the institution. I was surprised to see in the middle of the office (which was hung with fabulous tapestries) a pedestal on which stood a glass case containing an anatomically prepared human jawbone. Below was a brass plate identifying the jawbone of Molière, the immortal playwright, preserved as a relic by this French state theatre (the bones of saints are kept in churches). I went to see this grisly relic of the immortal, but the guard would not let me in. All I could do was peep through the crack of an iron door. I did see that the ante-room and 'foyers' backstage were much more luxuriously furnished than the auditorium. There were gilt red plush seats, walls, which were hung with portraits and tapestries of museum quality. Some sort of backstage staff were strolling about the corridors. They had white buckles pumps, white stockings, black silk dresses and tailcoats. The whole thing reminded you of a palace at Versailles. The auditorium is daintily furnished.

working at his novel, *Autumn Journey*. Since we have been leading our wandering life, M. has gone back to the habit of his earliest youth, writing in cafés. He says that his fellows of the nineties were really imitating the young Parisian poets, who, having no decent quarters of their own—exactly like the lads in Budapest—, would sit around all day in cafés, and when they were suddenly overwhelmed with inspiration would shout loudly and excitedly to the waiter for writing materials, called *quoi écrire*. M. even spent evening after evening writing his novel *The Paul Street Boys* in a Budapest café, to the constant accompaniment of a military band that was playing an engagement there. When we are in Paris, M. habitually writes both morning and afternoon in this quiet old café. We take lunch and dinner there, too. Since time of olden mind the Café Régence has been the favorite hangout of chess-players, which explains why most of the patrons are elderly gentlemen. The place where M. writes is called the 'Quiet Room' because it is usually occupied by taciturn chess addicts. In the middle of the room is a small marble table, just like all the rest, but without chairs, and roped off from the other tables by a red cord. On the table is a brass plate, with an inscription saying that Napoleon used to play chess at this table in the café when he was a young captain of artillery."

niece of Max Beerbohm, the writer and brother of Sir Herbert. M. had first met before in Salzburg at the festival with her who died young. His acquaintanceship girls went back to the late Sir Herbert, met by chance.

"After the New York production, the producer Henry W. Savage also put on M.'s in 1909, at the Royal Adelphi Theater in Lyn Harding in the leading role. He in rehearsals and the opening. (Incidentally, Berlin banned the play after thirty performances. M. P. to protest in Parliament.)

"Henry W. Savage was a distinguished man who looked after young M. shy, lost of London, and speaking no English. After the opening M. started home to H. Sunday morning, and Savage took him to He even went along the platform looking acquaintance in the train to whose care he East European guest.

"It happened that two of Savage's going to Paris by the same train: Sir Herbert and the English writer Napoleon Pa took charge of M. from London to Paris

me clippings from Hungarian papers that he had translated, which declared he was a German born in Frankfurt, whereas actually he was a native Londoner. Then he had finished denouncing the Hungarian pro-arker took up where he had left off, because of a Budapest newspaper notice of Parker's play *The Cardinal* (which, incidentally, was a hit). The critic made rather malicious fun of his first name, Napoleon, elaborating on the cheap witticism that if your name was Napoleon you ought to write a better play, or if you couldn't write a better play, then you should have a less pretentious name. " 'Tell your blockhead of a colleague,' snapped Parker, 'that my parents didn't ask my permission when they gave me that name, and if they had, I wouldn't have been able to answer.'

"From Paris M. wrote to Savage, 'In accordance with your kind request both gentlemen took care of me, unconsciously indeed that even in my desperation I was used by their bitter and undeniably justified reproach. I was unable to fling myself either from the speeding train or from the ship into the stormy Channel.' "

"Another play of M.'s that was produced in London

of the best theatrical seasons—the year of George V.

“Mr. Loraine was a protégé of Bernard Shaw. He read Loraine’s role, and was not pleased with it. Out of friendship for Loraine he revised the translation. (M. used to say that though he revised them, these must be the best lines of all his plays.)

“The second act takes place in the box of the theatre during a performance of *Madama Butterfly*. An orchestra plays the Puccini music behind the scenes. In Budapest, in Vienna, and in London they had seen an act of the opera, condensed for the occasion by Puccini, who chanced to be in London at the time of the dress rehearsal. After the second act he came on stage, and asked to speak to the musical director. The producer and his staff were terrified lest he raised a row about copyright and forbid the use of his music for the day left before the opening. To their surprise he did not do it. Puccini asked to see the score from which the backstage orchestra played, and worked over it, correcting it according to his taste. When he had finished he thanked the producer for choosing his music. In spite of coronation crowd, Bernard Shaw, Mr. Loraine, and the lovely Miss Carlisle, the party was anything but what you would call a success.

“These incidents are contained in a book

the island of Brioni, where Bernard Shaw was staying. This gentleman was a good friend of Shaw's. He offered to take M. along aboard the boat, and introduce him to Shaw. M. declined the offer, saying Bernard Shaw must merely be on Brioni island for a rest, and that M. was not forward as to disturb Shaw in his quiet summer retreat. M., who had read and admired nearly everything Shaw had written, told me later that he was simply afraid of the sharp-tongued great man.) I note this trifling incident only because ever since then, when anyone has wanted to introduce M. to some author of low degree, he has declined the proffered mediation with the words, 'I have had just one opportunity in my life to meet Bernard Shaw and having missed that chance, I am not inclined to seek Mr. Soandso's acquaintance.' "

"Unquestionably the most idolized Hungarian author in his own lifetime was the novelist Mór Jókai, whose nation and his king, Franz Joseph (the latter despite Jókai's leading role in the revolution of 1848 against the Hapsburgs), showered with every imaginable distinction. When Jókai had come to be a very old man, it became the custom among young Budapest writers on being presented to Jókai not to shake his hand, but to kiss it. The usual c

honor, Jókai, of whose novels the published edition in a hundred volumes.

"On the great evening a farcical topical presented, performed by an amateur cast of M. played the part of the world-famous C who had just been released, and accordingly was setting himself up as a book salesman of Jókai's novels. M's part required him to officer's uniform, red wig, and large, hooked

"After the performance the cast were Jókai. Like the other young writers, M outstretched hand, and was miserable for solemn moment, because his putty nose stuck of the nation's idol, and M., losing his presence left the Dreyfus proboscis attached to Jókai getting to greet the master, and hastily slipped only his own nose. Actually he was unhappy because it happened as because he was accidentally done the whole thing on purpose."

¶ "In Paris M. showed me the house on the rue des Capucines where the invention of the *bonnet à la Dreyfus*, patented in 1895, was first shown in public. For an admission fee, some forty years ago: the

nts at the time). Many films were shown; they ran about
minutes on an average. M. remembers four. One
called *Fontaine de Vaucluse*, showed the fountain and the
source of a merry streamlet. To work in some 'action',
an man walked across a little wooden bridge, waving his hand
to the camera. The second film showed a French caval
quadron making a wild onslaught during maneuvers. The
third showed an express train coming into a station and the
passengers getting off, of course not without waving their hats
to the camera. The fourth picture was comic: a garden
ner watering the garden with a hose, which splashed water
in his face. M. had not been to a film in Paris since
forty years later a movie theater on the same boulevard
showed M's *Liliom*, with young Charles Boyer in the title role.
Although M. admired him as an outstanding actor, he did
not go to see the picture, because the posters gave not M's
name as the author, but some German he had never heard of.
"

"We visited old Theodor Wolff in Nice this morning.
He was a great authority and a power in Berlin before
Hitler's time. He was the editor-in-chief of the *Berlin
Vossische Zeitung*. He was an indomitable champion of French
German friendship. When the German emperor, William

used to deride the Jews, having been, of a common Jewish given name, despite St. Louis. He was one of the greatest of Catholic Jew-baiters, but with a smile that the nickname was his own. He felt he was merely disavowing it for the moment. He had been helped by old friends now in Hitler's power (I think it was Neurath and Papen) to escape France. He fled in the dark of night, constantly accompanied by his whole family. His old 'Aryan' friends sent him off with and his fine library after him to Nice. He was a very friendly and only nice person, and certainly unhappy."

¶ "Today I went up in the elevator at the Casino de la Corniche in Nice with Sacha Guitry, who's been here for some time. According to M., his play, *Mon Père* (*My Father Was Right*), which he played with his father, the great Lucien Guitry, is one of the most successful of modern French comedies. We don't know much about it, but he smiled at me as if we were old friends. I have noticed before that French actors smile amiably at people who they see receive their work with a gracious form of thanks."

Mrs. Molnar (Lili Darvas), whom she did not know, after seeing her play at Reinhardt's theater. If I had been M. I could have gone over in the restaurant and thanked her for this gesture, even though I didn't know her."

"On account of the pouring rain today (in Nice) Claude Farrère, a member of the Académie Française, was twiddling his thumbs all morning in the empty reading room. He wrote that magnificent novel, *L'Homme Qui S'assassina*. We gaped at him from afar. M. admires him and has met him in Cannes, but did not speak to him, because although M. Farrère looked several times in our direction it was obvious that he did not recognize M. M. to see that Claude Farrère is a former French naval officer, destroyer captain. At that time the French papers carried a good deal about a controversy between him and a Greek royal prince (in fact, the Crown Prince). For political reasons some Bulgarians, as M. remembers it, were tortured and executed in Greek territory on the coast. The French press was outraged. The Greek prince issued a statement denying these atrocities. The next day a statement over the signature of Claude Farrère appeared in the French papers, stating that while passing close to shore a French destroyer he saw these tortures and executions.

thousands of small recollections of which find that he forgets some hundreds more

¶ “Tristan Bernard invited us to dinner at an out-of-the-way restaurant, Madame Robert to M. Bernard, this is the best small restaurant and the amiable and obliging Madame Robert (the way, has an imposing and carefully cultivated mustache) has the best wines for miles around.

(I must remark about this jotting, as above, follow, that it was Wanda's peculiar method to praise all the people she mentioned. If she mentioned them, she would neither speak nor write a

¶ “M. tells me there was a time in his life when he spoke for four months. This was more than M. lived from November to March in a sanatorium. Arriving there he was in a state that could be called morbid depression. He had no acquaintances in either Cannes or its surroundings.

“At first he was mute because he simply could speak to. (He was always passionately fond of chance hotel acquaintances.) He felt that his silence was a good thing, a means of self-

"He was working hard on a religious play, *Miracle of the Mountains*, which he kept writing all over again from beginning to end, and afterward rewrote numerous times. "During this time he became completely absorbed in the study of the New Testament. 'When I went to bed at night,' he said, 'I would read the Gospel in the old Hungarian Protestant version, but I would also have four other versions lying on the blanket: Luther's in German, the Latin Vulgate, a modern French one, and a quite new Hungarian translation made by a Catholic learned society. I read all this so that I could carefully compare and scrutinize each sentence.'

"M. says this was when he got accustomed to sedatives because the excitement caused by such a thoroughgoing acquaintance with the New Testament produced a kind of insomnia. A similar insomnia had attacked him many years before, at the time in his youth when he had devoured all of Tolstoy's books that had been translated into German or Hungarian, one after another."

(To this note I may add that the basic idea of my play described in Chapter II, *The King's Maid*, noted down long before that silence in Cannes, grew during those nights from a play outline into my profession of faith. It was ten years more before I decided to convert the

"We met Tristan Bernard at the station in Fze village. He told us joyfully that he had sold one of his successful comedies to a film company. 'I'm getting two hundred thousand francs' damages,' he said. . . . 'What do you mean, damages?' asked M. . . . 'You can't call any money that a self-respecting dramatist gets for one of his plays from a film company either a fee or a selling price; it's nothing but damages,' replied Tristan Bernard."

(That very day Wanda copied out T. B.'s remark, and we sent it to a Budapest columnist, who printed it. The story made the rounds of many European papers.)

"Late yesterday evening, in an awful storm, Alexander Korda and Charles Laughton came from Cannes to pick us up. I was glad of the chance to meet the two creators of that fine film, *Henry VIII*. Korda is a boyhood friend of M's, from the old days when both were reporters in Budapest. We took them to dinner in a little restaurant at Nice, Chez Adolphe, which delighted them. I ordered the special Chez Adolphe omelet for them. It's my favorite dish. It's an ordinary large omelet, with thirty or forty tiny whole fish fried in it. None is more than two centimeters long (about three-quarters of an inch). They are called Nona. M. Adolphe says they

retain this privilege for a hundred years. We because the hundred years will soon be up Omelet is extraordinarily good eating."

§ "Terrible news is coming from German Hitler regime. M's Berlin acquaintances are one after another, tired, despairing, leaving hind them in Germany. No one knows where or what will happen to him. We try to relieve sion by going often to the Nice Opera, taking at least a few evening hours in the sweet music.

"During intermission of the opera, *Low* Sholem Asch, the famous American Yiddish saw a Reinhardt production of his *God of V* Berlin, with 'the great old' Schildkraut in the He says it was an unforgettable evening. duction was simply that M. and Sholem knew each other by sight, walked up and s Sholem Asch's permanent residence is Nice and his family live on a farm that he owns wore the French Legion of Honor ribbon in t holes. The tiny little red ribbon brought the t closer together. They spoke of the French w

poleon's wish to have the decoration pinned when he lay on his bier.)

"After the performance we sat at a sidewalk Café Régence on the Avenue de la Victoire for a long time in the mild night. Both M. Asch told when, why, and how they had won the Legion of Honor.

"M. told Mr. Asch his story, which I know about. His play, *The Swan*, was produced at the Theater in Paris, managed by Firmin Gémier, a great actor and theatrical authority, who had cultivated an international friendship among artists. The evening M. had meant to leave Paris for his American friends, Tristan Bernard and Paul Ibsen, Flers, whispered smilingly to him that he must stay a couple of days more, because a pleasant surprise the government was awaiting him. Naturally M. expected what this meant. And sure enough, two days later in M's room at the Hotel Foyot next to the theater, Gémier's secretary came over to the Odéon Theater because M. had come from the French Foreign Office. Gémier wanted to present it solemnly in person, but just outside the stage door he discovered M. not shaved. He knew the French custom

Republic through the lips of M. Gémier. Then he shaved him down in front of a mirror, and soaped his face. M. saw in the mirror that M. Gémier was sitting in another chair with his back to him, with his head being hastily shaved by another barber. M. wanted a smooth face when he delivered the kisses of the republic. Each pretended not to see the other. They only met upstairs on the stage where the ceremony took place. Neither of them ever thought about the barbershop.

“M. was always proud of having received the Legion of Honor, actually at M. Gémier’s request, from the Foreign Minister, Aristide Briand, the same man who was often premier of France, and who was the unloved Nobel-Prize-winning champion of peace. Since his death has won a place in the Hall of Fame, not only of France but of Europe.”

§ “We watched the clerk in the Pharmacie waiting most reverentially on Maurice Maeterlinck while he was compounding some medicine or other formula. Maeterlinck is a beautiful old man. He lives here in Nice, and shops at the same pharmacy we once looked up to him like a demi-god. And indeed he is. *Blue Bird*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and *The Life*

summer of 1947, when we read that he was back home in his eighty-fifth year from Nice, we both felt sorry that we should not see this interesting, bushy-haired, whitening head and in the lobby. I was particularly moved when he said to the reporters before the ship sailed: "Eight years I have written twelve plays, taking them all home to France.")

¶ "Almost every day we see King Gustav outside the Hotel D'Angleterre at Nice, waving, either on his way to the tennis courts or on his way back in the afternoon. He is now ninety this year. He is a tall, thin, lanky old man who gets very briskly into his car, and waves his thanks to the people of Nice, who love him and are always waiting for him. In the lobby of his hotel is a large guest book in which everyone signs who has come to pay his respects to our acquaintances, a Hungarian aristocrat, a Frenchman, and a half's train ride, simply so that he can see the book. He confessed with a smile that he had never seen King Gustav V in his life.

"I mentioned that even on the street he showed aristocratic bearing and kingly manner, whereupon M. remarked that the King's

small French town of Pau. The lawyer's son, Bernadotte, the alleged baker's apprentice, was a soldier and eventually became one of Napoleon's marshals. He married into Napoleon's family and became King of Sweden under the name of Charles XIV. He was one of the most redoubtable of the adversaries who brought about Napoleon's downfall."

¶ "At the Opera in Nice we saw a performance of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. After the performance called the celebration on the night of the premiere of *Madama Butterfly*. The composer, Puccini, attended both the rehearsals and the performance at the Budapest Opera. (The opera itself, incidentally, is based on a play by David Belasco.)

"After the first night a rich Hungarian count, Hübner, gave a big supper party at his villa in Budapest. Puccini. Along with the singers appearing in the opera, the guests included critics, composers, writers (including them), artists, and other celebrities. The long table at which they sat presented an original spectacle. On top of a tablecloth, the table had on it huge square plates of crystal, representing the Japan Sea. On the plates, if upon a relief map was the scene of the opera, with its surrounding islands, with tiny models of

ience and then by the admiring party of artists at the supper. In order to complete Puccini's happiness, the supper guests had prepared a special treat, expressly designed for a composer: the finest of the true old Hungarian folk songs. A superb amateur pianist, István Bárczy, the mayor of Budapest, sat down to the piano. The songs were sung by the recognized chief expert in Hungarian folk music, the composer and captain of hussars Lőrinc Rátkóczy.

"The concert lasted longer than was intended, because the audience found to its growing alarm that Puccini was sitting silent, not the slightest trace of pleasure upon his face. The long concert finally ended with the exhaustion of the two folk song specialists thus bravely battling for the recognition of their national music. The company rewarded them with a tornado of applause.

"In reply to a timid question about the songs, Puccini flushed, used every imaginable polite phrase by way of preface, but finally admitted straight out that he did not care for them. And so this first and so far as I know last Budapest banquet for Puccini ended in an icy chill."

"We were lunching at the 'Ambassadeurs' in Cannes a few days ago when King Christian X of Denmark and his

cookies. But I don't mind, because judging by his face he is a kind person."

(Let me add that afterward, during the war, we often spoke of Christian X of Denmark. We read in the papers that when the Germans occupied Denmark, and issued an order requiring all the Jews to wear a yellow Star of David, the king and all his family put on yellow stars. The following Friday evening, the King went to the synagogue in Copenhagen.)

"There are wicker chairs in the winter sun on the street outside the Hotel Carlton at Cannes. Pointing to one of the chairs, M. told me that one afternoon he was sitting himself there, in a vile humor caused by the pain of a sprained ankle. (As indeed he often is, even with a sprained ankle.) A jolly, laughing party of ladies and gentlemen walked past, speaking English. A simply dressed little lady suddenly broke out of the group toward him, handing him a postcard and pencil, she said with a smile, 'May I ask for your signature on this card?' M., who had never seen her in his life, said not a word, but angrily took the card, scrawled his name on it, and handed it back to the lady with a surly look. 'Thank you,' said the little lady. 'My name is Helen Hayes; I've just been playing

MacArthur, had arrived, laughing. They soon felt his face turning red. Then the jolly general. Among them were Jeannette MacDonald, and her husband Irving Thalberg. "Awfully excluded, 'but my ankle stopped aching the heard she was Helen Hayes.' "

§ "At Juan les Pins I took a good look single black stone among the white flagstone side walk. Engraved in this black flagstone monument that Napoleon set foot on this spot with by surprise from exile in Elba on the first day to drive King Louis XVIII from Paris and on the imperial throne for the famous hundred days. strange feeling not only to see Napoleon's foot but to tread in it."

§ "A narrow staging runs out into the harbor. From this staging the sportsmen board their boats and motorboats. The name of the staging on the signboard, "Debarcadere Guy de Maupassant" story-teller lived here a great deal, and often Moved. I stood there for a long time looking

he kept on taking the then fashionable head-ache medicine, antipyrin, from morning till night. This francophile way of living killed him in his thirty-fourth year. I remembered his bust, in the Parc Monceau, thronged with nurses and baby-carriages. Maupassant's beautiful white marble monument was executed by the sculptor named Verlet, whom M. knew, and with some of his Hungarian artist friends at the time of the Emperor Julian. On top of a tall column is the lifelike head of the novelist; below it, on a marble bench, sits a nurse, dressed after the fashion of the period, much like the marble book in her hand—undoubtedly by the same artist. M. said that Max Nordau, the well-known Jewish-born German writer, wrote of this monument: 'The manly, mustached head of Maupassant looks down on all the pretty nursemaids with the baby-carriages, like a conceited sergeant trying to pick one out for his afternoon stroll, holding hands.' I think this is very expressive."

¶ "Yesterday evening a very beautiful woman and her party came into our Venice hang-out, the famous young girl, the niece: Maria José, the daughter of Albert I, King of Belgium, one of the great leaders of the First World War. (I saw his monument in Paris, and our hotel a

when I read the book. Her face was pale. I'm glad to have seen this phenomenon. I had heard a great deal about her. M. was at Max Reinhardt's in Salzburg. He talked so expertly about Mozart and I thought it better to hold his tongue. I bowed and did not even greet the prima donna. I granted that she would not remember these years."

¶ "I have a new neighbor at the Hotel Mistinguette. She is said to be over so beautiful that any young girl might envy. I saw her also Lucienne Boyer. And I was even Yvette Guilbert, the greatest of French singers who appeared at one matinee in Nice. I am an old lady. I had never seen her, but I knew her in prime thirty or forty years ago. Her voice could not have been better than now. Her *chansons* are still either extravagantly funny or tragically dramatic. I was absolutely delighted with all of these Frenchwomen. None of them lacks beauty. I am reminded of the famous actress Max Reinhardt used to give authors and directors. I would give a play, if you have to choose between

to each other. Both of these 'grand old men' of French literature lost heavily last night at the Casino."

(On one of those gloomy, rainy days in Nice—it had rained quietly but steadily for three days—I told Wanda the sad tale of the Vienna opening of my play *Harmonie*. In 1909 *Liliom* was a noiseless flop in Budapest. *Harmonie* of 1932, was a noisy flop in Vienna. So noisy that the Vienna correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt*—with a certain touch of malice—titled his wire "Theater Bravura in Vienna."

Actually the play is a romantic family comedy. The Hungarian premiere at Budapest a few months before had enjoyed, if not a great, a least a decent success. But apparently the play had in it something offensive to the German-speaking public, in which National Socialist sentiments already predominated. When I wrote the play and even up to the Vienna opening, I had not the faintest idea of this.

The male lead in the comedy is the president of a amateur choral society. The Vienna opening was short before Hitler seized power. By then all German choral societies were National Socialist to the core; that is, they were almost religiously devoted to the idea of uniting all Germans in a victorious Germany that would rule Europe.

sentimental fervor. The leading part head and conductor of a Hungarian society, was meant to satirize these petty bourgeois, who had struck me. The play has three acts, each one ending with a chorus; the songs fit the plot and so prove the author's skill.

In Budapest neither audience nor play was anything offensive or objectionable in all its details, where a wide and deep *Anschluss* movement was in progress, the opposition broke out at the first act of my innocent and unpolitical comedy.

The opening took place at the little house that belonged, and still does, to the government. The manager of the theatre and his friends were as much surprised as I by this outburst of hatred. A contributing cause was the marvelous Viennese comedian Reisinger, who had the lead, had fallen ill, and the manager had at the last moment the excellent Berlin actor, who, however had a Berlin accent, always understood by Viennese ears, and was Jewish into the bargain.

The second and third acts too were interrupted by a clamor of piercing whistles (the equivalent of booing), hissing, and shrill shouts. From the balcony came the roars of young men.

following wrath of a venomous crowd from a new aggressive world.

To cap the climax of that ugly evening I must add that I was invited to a first-night party after the show by Dorothy Thompson, whom I had known before, and who was living in Vienna, where her then husband, Sinclair Lewis, was working on a novel. I was supposed to meet Sinclair Lewis at this supper for the first time. Unfortunately I felt obliged—because, to be quite honest, I was ashamed—to decline Mr. and Mrs. Lewis's invitation by telephone.

In spite of this Vienna "reception," the Deutsches Theater in Berlin put the play on a few months later, with the most popular German comedian, Pallenberg, in the lead, and with an ingenious production by Max Reinhardt. At this opening—no doubt out of respect for the numerous detectives in attendance—only a single man in the first balcony took up the cudgels, whistling earsplittingly after the first-act curtain and shouting something extremely coarse to the actors.

The two managers of the theater, Karlheinz Martin and Rudolf Beer, fearing a repetition of the Vienna bravado, were so nervous that they rushed up to the balcony and slapped the man. Thereupon a sort of revolution broke out there too. The police squad that had been held ready

ring Italian cognomens, M. retorted that he would not dream of worrying over new diabolical names when he was as great an infernal expert as Dante had already done the work for him.

The play, M. tells me further, had twenty six scenes, which M. designed together with the Budapest critic József Márkus (later general manager of the Royal Opera). The two of them not only planned and sketched the sets, but worked nights along with the help in the little workshop of the scenery builder Kéri, painting, sawing, and driving nails.

The feminine lead is an unusually big and demanding part. Lili Darvas took the role in Budapest, Ida Roland in the Countess Cloudenbove Kaleritz in the Vienna Burgtheater, and Lenore Ulric in New York. Unfortunately the play was rewritten from the first to the last word for the New York production, and so much altered by excessive additions that the original is hard to recognize in the printed English version. ('All the Plays,' New York, 1909, The Vanguard Press. With a foreword by D'Annunzio.)

Belasco gave this adaptation a splendid production at enormous expense, even completely rebuilding the auditorium of his theater, transforming it into a machine factory. But he was not able to keep it running long, because he wrote to M., although he was doing capacity business, "the gross did not cover the tremendous weekly expenses."

"We went to a movie in Venice. We saw a film with a dinner party laid in the splendid palace of a millionaire. During this scene a famous and fashionable movie actor in a dinner jacket carried on a brief conversation with a society dowager. He had his hands in his trouser pockets the whole time. When the movie let out, M. said that in his opinion the emperor and king, Franz Joseph, had always displayed more polished and respectful manners toward ladies in public than any drawing-room actor, even the most elegant in London, Paris, or Vienna. (On this occasion I told Wanda that I had intended to observe Emperor and King Franz Joseph in Budapest when I was sent out as a reporter to cover the great banquet of the Ludovika Military Academy in 1896. The banquet which Franz Joseph attended, was part of the Hungarian thousand year jubilee celebration. I was eighteen at the time, and I watched the emperor-king's behavior avidly. The numerous ladies, mostly wives of high officers, were introduced to him in succession. Each was homelier than the last. The emperor-king, sixty-six years old, wore the smart uniform of a Colonel of Hussars: short black tunic, black trousers, patent-leather shoes, the tunic very modestly trimmed with gold lace. He was a pink-faced

million souls stood at attention like a young lieutenant. He offered his hand in farewell, with the respectful timidity of a twenty-year-old, to the stately ladies. My fellow-journalists were generally agreed that not only any *fin de siècle* drawing-room actor but any proud aristocrat might have taken example by him. This did not keep us from remembering that when our elegant old colonel of hussars was nineteen, on the sixth of October, 1849, he had thirteen generals of the army that was fighting for Hungarian freedom hanged. I also told Wanda that some years later when the German emperor William II came to Budapest he caused general hilarity by bowing as deep as the stomach of the first baroness who was introduced to him, a far from beautiful and publicity-loving lady, and kissed her hand, which he discovered at that level (though it would have been more than enough simply to take her hand.)

"In Nice I made the acquaintance of the successful German playwright Hans Mueller. M. has known him for a long time. Every evening after dinner Hans Mueller catches us for a visit to the terrace of a sidewalk cafe where we carry on a rather gloomy conversation, sometimes until after midnight. Mueller and Mueller's

more pressing business the very morning of his arrival to send his adjutant post-haste after the Jewish Harnacher. When Mueller arrived, the emperor dictated an immensely long literary and political interview for the (likewise non-Aryan) *Neue Freie Presse* newspaper. "This climax of his writing career was anything but helpful to Mueller under Hitler. He emigrated, and now lives in Switzerland. With quizzical wisdom he told us, as we sat on the cafe terrace, about the low point of his career. Like any other dramatist, he had a flop among his great successes. Many years ago his play *Hargnauer und Bach* failed at Franz Joseph's own Burgtheater in Vienna. Mueller told us that he regarded the failure as the low point in his career solely because at the moment when he came onstage after the performance to make a bow as author, a well-known first nighter of the type, Mr. B. H., flawlessly dressed in white tie and tails, sat from his front-row seat up to the stage, quite regardless of the powerful German emperor's friendship. His action Mr. B. H. stirred such enthusiasm in the audience that, as Mueller put it, he really stole the show even though the performance was over."

"There is an international film festival in the L.

so nervous that we left the restaurant a few minutes. Some days later a movie that Frank Borzage had taken from Hollywood from M's children's story, *The Paul Street Boys*, won a prize. According to the *Corriere*, it "tore up" shed tears and applauded enthusiastically at the end. But by then we were in Vienna."

§ We had a bookseller order all the Italian editions of *The Paul Street Boys* for us at San Remo. The Venerian prize, six different Italian publishers had put out six different translations, chiefly because of the reason or other the story is in the public domain under Italian law. This meant that M. never got a royalty from any of the publishers."

§ "Memo Benassi, the celebrated actor, M's long-time partner, called on M. at the hotel in San Remo. He brought with him his enormous, beautiful white dog. I had met Benassi, and his dog also, in Venice when he directed M's play, *The Glass Slipper*, in Venice at the Teatro Goldoni. Benassi also played the male lead. The thing he took most pride in at the opening of the play was directing, but the fact that at the second act

d in several of M's plays. A high-spirited woman. I have never seen her on the stage, but from the way she ordinarily behaves I think she must be a good actress. She has a great longing to go to America, which I find hard to understand, because she is making a lot of money, and is very highly thought of."

"M. spoke to me two or three times of an Italian play which once celebrated all over Europe, Roberto Braccio's name. When M. was a young journalist in Budapest, long before he turned playwright himself, he used to admire Braccio's brilliant comedies, his cultivated and very polished dialogue, and particularly the play called *Unfaithful*. M. has not altered his high opinion of the man. "Once, long ago, he promised to get me a play by Braccio's in book form. We dropped in on our bookseller in Venice for detective stories, of which M. bought eighteen pounds. Suddenly remembering his promise, he asked, 'Do you happen to have a comedy by Roberto Braccio?' The bookseller made a gesture expressing bewilderment and regret. 'What?' asked M., 'is he dead?' 'No,' replied the bookseller. Then, putting his finger to his lips, he looked around to make sure no one was listening, and

‘Why doesn’t Bracco leave Italy?’ The boopered back, in the doorway, ‘Duce won’t let he shut the door behind us.’”

§ (We heard again about Roberto Bracco in Geneva. Italian anti-Fascist emigres told Bracco had lived for a while with one of his friends, a very elderly gentleman who was a staunch anti-Fascist. They waited and waited year out, for the overthrow of Mussolini . . . his friend died; Bracco buried him, and put on his dead friend’s name and the words, “I am waiting.”)

§ “Going from Milan to Venice we rode along the south shore of beautiful Lake Como. Desenzano M. pointed through the spring in the distance, toward the shore half way along the lake where out there is a well known, fashionable resort called Gardone Riviera. Right next to Gardone Riviera is a village by the name of Carnaccio. In Carnaccio a wonderful garden, stands the villa of Gabriele d’Annunzio, which has been called ‘Il Vittoriale’ by the Milanese.”

velist, dramatist, and poet, in the uniform of a naval officer, standing on the bridge of a warship and making a speech to a large group of young people, apparently students; but this group was not on the deck of the ship, gathered around the ship—in a garden."

(I believe this calls for explanation. The explanation is as follows. After World War I D'Annunzio organized a legion with which he captured and occupied Fiume, an important Adriatic seaport. The city was taken from Hungary by the victorious Entente, and was not joined to Yugoslavia, as President Wilson had planned, but was given to Italy, obviously in consequence of D'Annunzio's private work and determined propaganda was given to Italy. The Italian government gave D'Annunzio, who lost an eye in the action, every imaginable reward. He received the rank and title of a prince, *Principe di Montenevoso*. The government published a deluxe edition of his selected works at public expense. As a gift from the nation he received the house with the wonderful garden at Capri, Capriaceto, a house famous for its beauty and artistic furnishings, which the Italian government confiscated as part of the war reparations, from a German scholar and art historian Henry Thode, professor at Heidelberg University, an enthusiastic historian of Italian renaissance painting.

long distance from the sea to Cargnacco, and fully reassembled on the top of a little hill in front of D'Annunzio's villa. When I was strolling about the hill I was able, like any other tourist, for a small fee to inspect the lovely garden, which had as its truly unique garden ornament: the biplane warship.

D'Annunzio was often visited by delegations, patriotic organizations, universities, and the like. He failed to receive these groups wearing his uniform, to make his speeches from his command post on the deck of his warship, while the delegation gathered in the vessel in the flowery garden. The photographs of this still exist somewhere in one of my forgotten drawers in Budapest, was no scoop of an enterprising newspaper photographer. D'Annunzio himself got it made, and thousands printed as picture postcards. The photographs had for a few centesimi not only in Cargnacco, but in stationery and cigar stores all over north Italy. I bought my copy from a tobacconist in Gardone.

Here I was informed that by giving a small tip to the caretaker of D'Annunzio's villa I might see the interior. This was D'Annunzio's favorite summer retreat. The rooms in the vicinity are extremely hot in summer. From the grotto a cool, clear little spring of water flows. The water is said to be very pure and healthy.

in one big volume. The responsibility for this tale of a naked poet-hero with the oilcloth classics rests upon the tobaccoist who told it to me. But the grotto and the painting could certainly be seen, of course only when D'Arzizio was not sitting there, and of course for a moment only to the gardener.)

"In the lobby of the Hotel Danieli in Venice we made the acquaintance of Calente, the actor. He has played *The Cenci* in Italy with Tatiana Pavlova, the Russian actress with the Italian name. Signor Calente introduced a pretty girl, saying, 'She is the voice of Greta Garbo.' It seems that according to one of Mussolini's decrees all American movies have to speak Italian. In Italy this girl always talks on the screen for the great Greta. According to Calente the Italian actors call her the Unknown Soldier."

Recollections from Geneva.

(From a letter to me written while on a short visit to my family in Budapest.) "Last night Salusinszky, editor of the *Uz* newspaper, phoned to tell me that the press chief of the Italian legation here had been calling

told me the Italian legation had telephoned again after midnight, asking the papers not to print the story because word has just arrived from Rome that Mussolini had revoked the award."

(As I read these lines, I recall the story in Emil Ludwig's book of conversations with Mussolini, that Mussolini told him of lulling suspicion in Milan on October 27, 1922, the eve of the march on Rome, by going placidly to see a play of mine, *The Swan*—not, I may say, to enjoy the show, but to show himself as a peaceful citizen.)

¶ (When in the course of our wanderings we reached Geneva, she merely wrote to her family that we had rooms in the same hotel where our Queen Elisabeth's apartment had been at the time when she was assassinated. I now note briefly the rest of what I told her that same day at her request; she wanted to store it all away in her memory.

We had to leave France because the papers wrote ever more alarmingly about the imminent war, and because already thousands of German refugees were crossing the French border every day. Not only Paris but the cities in the south of France, Nice, Cannes, swarmed with alleged newspapermen who were really spies. We had fled in haste from Italy, too, because Mussolini's venomous police, imitating the Germans, were taking too much interest in our passports and the purpose of our stay.

For many years I had spent a part of each summer at Karlsbad, Czechoslovakia. Wanda too had grown fond of Karlsbad's charming small-town atmosphere and its mud baths, which proved very good for her. But we could

not even go there any more. The handsome, monumental building that houses the main baths of Karlsbad was known under the Austrian emperors as the Emperor Bath; on the staircase is a gigantic mural, representing the legendary scene of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV with his hunting party, discovering by accident the medicinal hot spring in the Czechish forest. According to the legend as shown in the mural, the hunting party was struck by the fact that the hot waters were absolutely teeming with bears, wolves, and other wild beasts seeking relief from their pains. The Karlsbad doctors declare that all carnivorous wild animals living in those damp forests suffer from rheumatics.

I had a letter from a friend in Karlsbad, observing that nowadays the hot springs were teeming again with beasts of prey, this time the modern variety—members of the Gestapo and other incorporated murderers. That was the end of our hankering for Karlsbad.

So we went to Geneva, at whose university I had put in two semesters studying law in 1892 and 1896. My late father took me to Geneva so that I should acquire perfect French. Wanda made me show her the university in its spacious garden surroundings, where she was soon to become a student, then the Brasserie Landolt, the beer hall we students had frequented, and the suburban house in the Avenue de Flourent where I had lived for a year. A few years after the university semesters I came back to Geneva, this time as a newspaperman.

In September, 1898, an Italian anarchist named Luccheni murdered Elisabeth, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, on the lakeshore promenade in Geneva,

stabbing her in the breast with a rasp. The Hungarians worshiped their queen, whom they regarded, not without reason, as a foe of the Hapsburg anti-Hungarian policy and an unfailing friend of the Hungarian people. I was a young newspaperman when the *Budapesti Napló* sent me to Geneva to cover the trial of the assassin. Wanda made me show her the spot where the murderer stabbed the queen. A well hidden cross marks the place today, a cross visible only to a person who is looking for it. I had to show her the Confiserie Désarnod, where the queen had tea half an hour before her assassination, and the courthouse where the trial took place, and where I had the most alarming moment of my young life. Being a subject of the murdered queen, I was given a seat at the trial in the front row of benches reserved for the newspapermen who poured in from all over the world.

Days beforehand the anarchists began flooding Geneva with threats. The day of the trial, according to the Geneva papers, the anarchists planned to blow up the courtroom with a bomb. Not without some trepidation we took our seats on the press benches. When the courtroom attendants brought in Luccheni, the murderer, he went quite close to the long table at which other newspapermen and I were sitting. The assassin gave us a sarcastic laugh. (The death penalty had long since been abolished in Geneva.) As he passed our table, he paused for a moment and pounded violently upon the table, right among the papers of my neighbor John Grand-Carteret of the *Paris Figaro*. He laughed raucously, pointing at Grand-Carteret's great beard. Everyone in the courtroom sprang to his feet—

judge, spectators, witnesses, attendants. Everybody, myself included, thought a bomb had gone off.

And I told Wanda how, when the death penalty was abolished in Geneva, a great controversy began in the Swiss and French press. It was then – if I am not mistaken – that the French writer Alphonse Karr replied to a newspaper inquiry with the famous words that the death penalty ought to be abolished, but “*que Messieurs les assassins commencent.*” The same Alphonse Karr wrote two famous books with the two amusing titles: “Plus ça change . . .” and “. . . plus c’est la même chose.” (“The more things change . . . the more they remain the same”.) A street in Nice is named after this witty author, Rue Alphonse Karr. The American consulate was on that street in 1939. Here I got the visa that allowed me to come to America in 1940. As we went toward the consulate, I pointed at the street sign, and again told Wanda Karr’s remark about the death penalty, forgetting I had told her in Geneva. Neither then nor at any other time did she ever embarrass me by remarking that I had already told her some story.)

¶ (In the last paragraph I mentioned Karlsbad, the Czechoslovak watering place. Here I will add two brief Karlsbad stories that Wanda got from me, and was fond of telling when the conversation turned to the fashionable subject of reducing diets. In each of these shorter than short stories the chief part was played by a Budapest financial figure. Both were fat. For decades both took

the reducing cure under doctor's orders at Karlsbad, which was famous for its efficacy in this field.

One of the two was the bank president Baron Marcel Madarassy-Beck, who fell victim to the Nazis in 1944. He confessed that he could never resist the good Austrian and Czechish cooking at Karlsbad, and so never followed the prescribed diet. But every summer he would take a quantity of collars with him to Karlsbad, not all the same size, but a series, each half a size larger than—yesterday's. He ate well and amply. Yet after his three weeks' dieting, his neck would be swimming in the largest collar. People seeing him would exclaim, "Goodness, but you've lost weight!" He maintained that even a doctor once warned him not to overdo the reducing.

The second Karlsbad story is about the one-time king of the Budapest stock exchange, Simon Krausz, who went to Karlsbad for several decades to reduce. Here his doctor kept a careful record of how many pounds he lost per year. The whole story can be summed up in one sentence: Krausz gave a great banquet at Karlsbad to celebrate the five-hundredth pound he lost there. His doctor made the formal address at the banquet, mentioning that the patrons of Karlsbad, according to official statistics, went away every year sixty tons lighter than they had arrived.)

¶ "On the big bridge we met the young Prince Ferdinand von Liechtenstein, whose cousin is the reigning prince of Liechtenstein. (This tiny sovereign principality is between Austria and Switzerland.) We knew Prince

Ferdinand in Vienna. 'How do you happen to be in Geneva?' the prince asked M. . . . 'I'm an émigré, a wanderer,' he answered, and added, 'You know, Hitler.' . . . 'Have you come here for good?' the prince asked. . . . 'I can't,' said M. 'Just a few days ago the Geneva police renewed my permit a few weeks more, for the last time.' . . . 'Oh, well,' the prince almost shouted, 'one word from you, and I'll have the reigning prince declare you a citizen of Liechtenstein; it's a small, neutral country, marvelous situation and climate, a liberal government, and you can stay there as long as you like.' M. looked at me. 'And the young lady, too,' the prince quickly added. We thanked him for his thoughtfulness, but politely declined the offer."

¶ "An unexpected arrival at our table at the Café Flots Riants was Maurice Goldschild, the faithful secretary of Pitoëff, the outstanding Russian-born French actor and director. He brought sad news. Pitoëff, comparatively a young man, had just died. Goldschild came to Geneva because Mme. Pitoëff, Ludmilla, was playing in Geneva. The faithful little secretary and man-of-all work came to her from Paris. M. and I both were deeply moved.

"We were grateful to Pitoëff because he, with the help of the faithful Goldschild, had extorted a *permis de séjour* for M. in Paris, during the days when we were forced to flee from Vienna. Hitler himself moved right into our Vienna hotel. In those days getting a *Carte d'Identité* was the hardest thing of all. This was because a few days after M. submitted his application, a young Polish refugee by

the name of Grynszpan shot a high German official named Rath. This was extremely painful to the French government. Then, after we got the *Carte d'Identité*, we had to flee from Paris here to Switzerland, because war had broken out between France and Germany. But even here uneasiness torments us. The French border is ten minutes away. The Genevese have been arguing all day whether the Germans would invade Switzerland through Basel, or the French here, through Geneva. It is an unusually cold winter, but our windows are open at night so that we can hear any alarm. Our nerves will not stand it long."

§ "There's no need to be afraid of the Italians invading Switzerland. At least not while Mussolini is at the helm in Italy.' This reassurance came from a Swiss radical newspaperman during those anxious weeks when Geneva was a packed crossroads of European fugitives. Impoverished and terrified men, women, old people, and children raced through the city from the east westward and from the north southward. They would all sit with downcast faces in the sidewalk cafés along the lakeshore, hundreds and hundreds of them, waiting for visas, passports, permits, and above all for money. They were the picture of despair, an uncertain future before them, their eyes fixed dully on the blue lake. (M. sits from nine a.m. to noon every morning at one of the little iron tables of the sidewalk café, among the unhappy refugees, filling notebooks with his long novel, *Autumn Journey*, which is full of premonitions of a coming war in Europe—practically a hopeless undertaking, since M. does not know whether

his Hungarian publisher will be allowed to issue the book.) The radical newspaperman who reassured us at this café was a regular Sunday lunch guest of the great Italian historian Guglielmo Ferrero (author of the celebrated *Grandezza e decadenza di Roma*), whom the anti-fascists recognize as their leader; he is living in exile as a professor at the university here.

"The newspaperman pulled us into a corner of the café, and explained why Switzerland need not fear invasion from Mussolini. He said, 'The Swiss government has Mussolini in the hollow of its hand.' His explanation is as follows. For some years after the end of World War One Mussolini lived in Switzerland, where, oddly enough, he taught French. During this time he was under treatment in the hospital at Lausanne. The case history of his illness and all the actual medical documents concerning the treatment still exist, and are in the hands of the Swiss government. The newspaperman told us that the nature of Mussolini's disease was such as to cut his political career short if the Swiss government published the documents. That's what the radical newspaperman told us; we said it was quite possible that the documents still existed, but we doubted very much whether publishing them would hurt Mussolini's career as a dictator."

(I may say that a little Swiss socialist weekly printed the whole story later, if in over-cautious terms, without damaging Mussolini in the slightest.)

§ "As we were crossing a wide, handsome boulevard, M. pointed out the street sign: 'Boulevard Georges

Favon.' M. wrote his first newspaper story here in Geneva. It appeared in *Le Genevois* newspaper in 1896. M. wrote the article, in French, about the Geneva National Exposition of the time. He was a university student, eighteen years old. M's French and the whole story were edited by the then editor-in-chief of *Le Genevois*, Georges Favon, a friend of M's landlord, Professor Reverchon. The same Georges Favon for whom the wide, handsome boulevard is named now. A strange, almost touching thought, I can't say why."

¶ "We've heard about the horrible suicide of one of our Viennese acquaintances, the extremely witty Egon Friedell. He was a strange mixture of journalist, humorist, scholar, and actor. Among other things he wrote an interesting and successful two-volume *Cultural History*. Out of sheer admiration for Max Reinhardt he used to take small, usually comic parts in plays Reinhardt directed.

"One day, before the war but after Hitler and his troops had marched into Vienna, Friedell looked down at the street from the window of his apartment, and saw a patrol of Hitler's dreaded SS troops rushing into the building. He was sure they had come to arrest him and drag him off to a concentration camp. He jumped out of his window, and died instantly. (Later it turned out that the SS men had come to arrest someone else.)

"Despite this cruel ending to his life, one of the quips for which he was famous in Vienna was not forgotten. There lived in Vienna a broken down 'journalist,' a man who used to hang around cafés in ragged clothes, dirty

and always unshaven, and who wrote 'reviews' of plays for his weekly paper—but not without going, on opening day, to the author, producer, and leading players, and touching them for small, really ludicrously small sums for a 'favorable notice.' The man was accordingly despised by the newspapermen in Vienna. Once when this man was being damned in the Café Central (the chief hangout of the Vienna *literati*), Friedell said with a gentle smile, 'I can forgive him, because he takes so little money that it borders on incorruptibility.' "

¶ "On the lake shore we passed by a big café. It's called the Café du Nord. As a young student M. used to come here because all you had to do was order a single cup of coffee, and the waiter would put on your table a whole stack of the latest Paris papers and illustrated weeklies. In those days the café was the hangout of Russian revolutionary émigrés, who used to sit around in the half-darkness at the back of the café, reading, or more likely playing chess. After a year's law study M. left Geneva, but he has often been back here since.

"On a later occasion he heard a waiter at this same Café du Nord pointing out to foreign tourists a corner table where, he explained, a soft-spoken, unassuming Russian student once used to sit every day reading law publications or expounding by the hour in Russian to the lads who clustered around him. Later, the waiter explained, the student went back to Russia, but was deported to Siberia, and later still he became famous. The Russians at the café in the old days used to say his name was Ulianov:

But he wrote his pamphlets under the name of 'Lenin.' - 'In fact,' the waiter said with a grin to the tourists, 'you may have heard of him yourself.'

"M. says he must have seen him often, without having the slightest idea who he was."

¶ "On the sidewalk terrace of the Café Flots Riants M. pointed out to me a gigantic, fashionable looking man with a white-haired old lady even taller than himself. Both of them were staring dully, not uttering a word, at the lake and at Mont Blanc, towering beyond it into the clouds. M. told me that the man, Count Ludi Salm, whom he had known in Berlin and Vienna, had introduced him a few days before to the old lady, saying, 'My mother.' Count Ludi Salm comes from one of the oldest German baronial, in fact princely families. (Count Ludi is fairly well known in America, too, where he married and was divorced.) During the years after World War I he never took part in the pre Hitler persecution of the Jews, but some of his relatives were leading figures in the torturing and hanging of Hungarian Jews during 1919 and 1920. When M. asked why he was in Geneva, Count Ludi pointed to the regal looking, gigantic old lady, and said, 'My mother is Jewish.' He said his mother had had on the piano in the drawing room of her Vienna palace a celebrated collection, twenty or more, of photographs of European Kings and princes, all autographed and inscribed to her, and framed in heavy, costly silver frames. One day some men from the Gestapo appeared at the dowager countess's, laid the photographs most respect-

fully aside, and took all the silver frames and the countess herself to headquarters. The countess's release was accomplished with great difficulty—that of the silver frames was not, and now she is in flight with her non-anti-Semitic son, they know not whither. We never saw them again. The old lady's fate we do not know. I saw in the paper that Count Ladi Salm jumped out of a window on the sixth floor of the Ritz Hotel in Budapest, and was instantly killed."

New York memories.

¶ (From her first letter, written in New York, May, 1940) "Came here alone from Budapest. They say it is almost 4500 miles. M. did not come out to meet me at the dock, because he was sick in bed at home. He can't even stir—lumbago. On board ship I was met by Mr. Göndör, M.'s friend of twenty-six years' standing.

"M. tells me that days before the ship was due to arrive, Mr. Göndör, the publisher of a local Hungarian weekly called *Az Ember*, appeared at his bedside and told him, 'I know you're expecting someone aboard the *Rex* whom I don't know, but whom you can't get out to meet. I have a newspaper pass for the tender that takes the doctors, immigration officials, and newspapermen out to the liner. I'll go and get her, so that she shan't be lugged off to Ellis Island.' M. said, 'Thank you, but her passport and visa are all in good order.' . . . 'Well, you never can tell,' said Göndör. M. replied, 'But how are you going to recognize her, since you've never seen each other?' Göndör said, 'Telephone her on shipboard to keep her eye out,

when the ship lays to, for a man waving a newspaper called *Az Ember*.' And so he did.

"Göndör had to board the tender in the pouring rain at eight in the morning, soaked to the skin. At three in the afternoon they let him aboard the liner *Rex*, where he frantically waved the paper. Within a few minutes we met according to plan, and went to the immigration official's desk. But before Mr. Göndör could start the prepared speech that he had carefully memorized on my behalf, I turned on my visa-getting smile, and immediately got an entry permit for a year. Göndör took me to M.'s room, 835 in the Plaza.

"M. was in such pain that he could hardly shake hands. When I knocked on his door I was still a tourist. But the moment I crossed the threshold I became a nurse."

§ "At last I have met Max Reinhardt, in the Neugroeschl Restaurant on West 81st Street. I would never have believed he was so superstitious. He showed us a little gold figure 13 on his watch-chain. He told us it was his superstition on opening nights to spit ever so slightly on the back of actors he had directed, so that they should make a hit. The rules of this superstition require that the actor must not be aware of it. M. told how on the opening of his play *The Devil* at Turin in 1908, Zacconi, then the leading Italian actor, accidentally spat on him on the darkened stage. M. now begins to think it may not have been accident, but superstition."

§ "I went to Baltimore for the tryout of M's play, *The King's Maid*, which never hit New York. One morning I went down to take a look at Washington. What a coincidence! As I got off the train at Union Station I saw President Roosevelt being helped into another train. I SAW ROOSEVELT!"

§ "Reinhardt and M. were talking about times before World War I. (Incidentally, M. refers to World War I these days as 'the first third of The World War.') About thirty years ago, before the war Reinhardt and his Berlin company made a guest appearance at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in Paris. The production was considered a 'Franco-German rapprochement,' and actively supported by both governments. Out of precaution, however, Reinhardt began by having his German actors do a play in which not a word of German was heard—the pantomime *Sumurun*. M. was in Paris at the time. At Reinhardt's request he often served as interpreter when Reinhardt (who spoke only German) had to deal with French playwrights and theatrical agents, or give interviews to Parisian newspapermen. Reinhardt took M. along as interpreter to that memorable theater evening when the Russian Ballet performed the *Afternoon of a Faun* for the first time in Paris. They both say this was the biggest theatrical row they ever experienced."

(I will round out these lines with the detailed recollection of that evening as Reinhardt and I recalled it. Reinhardt and I were eye witnesses to the performance, now famous in theatrical history, of Debussy's ballet, *L'Après-*

Midi d'un Faune, the music of which has since become classic. The evening was eagerly looked forward to. Serge Diaghilev's Russian Ballet - originally "The Ballet of the Imperial Theater at St. Petersburg" - included the dancers Vatzlav Nijinsky, Tamara Karshavina, and Anna Pavlova, all of them already famous; Michael Fokine, the choreographer and stage director; Léon Bakst, the scenic designer; and other really first-class talents. The composer Igor Stravinsky, whose various ballets *Petrushka* and *The Firebird*, among others were produced by the troupe with great success in Paris, must also be included among the company. This time Claude Debussy's composition, *The Afternoon of a Faun*, was announced; it was based on a work by the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Nijinsky had the leading role; Bakst designed the set.

Some days beforehand word got around that in his new part Nijinsky would play an exceedingly daring scene, one that would put even the broad minded public of Paris to the test. Naturally tickets for the evening were simply not to be had. Reinhardt was invited to sit in the box of a rich old lady, one of the great patronesses of the Russian ballet. He was told that another occupant of the box would be Jean Cocteau, the French poet, then very young but already a fashionable and controversial figure.

Reinhardt, though a great actor, director, and a world-famous showman, was always the shyest of men. On top of that, he spoke no language but his own. He took me along to interpret between him and this party of French intellectuals. In the event he had little use for my services, because the rich lady was not French but English, and

she spoke no French, nor could I speak English. As regards Jean Cocteau—then scarcely past twenty—he did not concern himself with the two *étrangers*, for he spoke not a word to either Reinhardt or me all evening, in French or any other tongue. Several guests came in, none of whom paid us any attention. Our box was in the middle of the balcony, directly facing the stage, so that we had a good view of everything.

A distinguished audience jammed the orchestra of the theater, one of the biggest in Paris. The ladies wore the height of evening finery. So far as the men were concerned, it was still the fashion in Paris for gentlemen not only at the opera but on every grand theatrical occasion, like this one, to wear white tie and tails in the orchestra, along with black ebony walking sticks, and top hats that they solemnly removed only at the moment when the curtain rose.

The performance of the ballet began in a festive mood. Nijinsky, as a critic wrote the following day, outdid himself. It is said that he never made such a hit with the Parisian audience before or after. The public was equally enthusiastic over Debussy's magnificent music and Bakst's novel, colorful set.

The last scene of the one-act ballet arrived. The nymph, tripping and fluttering, fled from the stage, leaving Nijinsky, who played the part of the faun aflame with love, alone upon the scene. But she also left behind her long, light, transparent veil. Nijinsky—the lovelorn faun—seized the veil and danced, dragging it toward a rock in the woodland stage set, like a triumphant lover carrying off a girl. By the rock he smothered the veil with amorous

kisses, playing the love scene that we had been hearing about for days, which actually did try the tolerance of the festive audience.

When the curtain fell upon this final scene, there was a brief moment of dead silence. But in that instant bedlam broke out. Part of the audience applauded wildly. Others yelled, screeched, swore, hissed, and whistled piercingly--the French and central European theatrical equivalent of booing in America. When the players appeared before the curtain to take their bow, the tumult reached its height. We saw men amid the uproar standing on their seats, out-bellowing the rest in denunciation of this "infamy" and "immorality." Tailcoated gentlemen with high hats on their heads belabored one another with their elegant ebony walking-sticks. A few exchanged punches without walking-sticks. We plainly saw ladies pulling one another's--as yet unbobbed hair. Policemen appeared in the orchestra, but immediately fled before the fury of the crowd. The battle between the two parties went on for many long minutes.

Reinhardt and I, who had never seen anything like this, looked in alarm at the other guests in the box. They were not in the least disturbed. The rich old lady and Cocteau smiled loftily; both applauded with elegant restraint.

To our great surprise, the opposition was the first to weary of its noisemaking. The cursing, hissing, and whistling gradually died down, and the applause grew ever stronger, with shouts of "Bis! Bis!" usually translated in English by the French word "Encore!" Finally the opposition died away entirely. The storm of applause prevailed; little by little it grew general.

With victory thus apparently assured, the stage manager came out in front of the curtain. "Do you want us to play the ballet over again?" he asked.

Now the "Bis! Bis!" resounded quite without protest. The lights went down, the curtain rose, and the whole ballet was repeated from beginning to end. Nijinsky played the close exactly as before. We could feel what pains he took not to alter the scene by a hair. Universal applause rewarded him. But during the repetition we did see a good many empty seats in the orchestra.

After the performance there was a banquet at the Restaurant Larue in honor of the company. More than a hundred of us were present to welcome the young, boyish-looking, pale, and exhausted Nijinsky with our applause on his arrival. With him came a tallecoated giant whom we assumed even now we are not sure to be the famous Serge Diaghilev, credited by legend with a supernatural influence on Nijinsky's entire, unfortunately so brief, career. "It was the finest evening of our lives, wasn't it?" the giant said enthusiastically, loudly, and in French to the dancer, so that we should all hear and understand.

"*C'était beau,*" said Nijinsky calmly, with a tired smile.)

§ "Max Reinhardt lives mostly in Hollywood, where he has a house and a dramatic school. He's in New York now to produce a play. He was talking to us about his younger years. I particularly liked one little story." (Wanda afterward remarked that I ought to tell Leonard Lyons the

ry for his column.) "When Reinhardt—at the height of his glory—was living in Berlin, he used to go every evening after the performance and supper to the café, to preside over his regular table. Here writers, actors, directors, and critics would meet every evening and argue about literature and the theater until six a.m. or later.

"Hat-check girls were still an unknown institution in central European cafés. Big hat-trees used to stand in the corners, where the patrons would hang up their things. On those days of course hundreds of play scripts were submitted to Reinhardt at the theater. But, he told us, there were wily and impatient young playwrights who did not care to wait through months of red tape before they got an answer from the theater management. After midnight they would sneak into the café, where for a modest tip the headwaiter would tell them which among the many overcoats was Reinhardt's. When Reinhardt went home from the café at dawn, he would sometimes find three or four scripts in his pockets.

"We asked him whether he gave these priority in reading, and he replied, 'Of course.' "

(On the way home from the restaurant where we had dined with Max Reinhardt, we talked a good deal about him. He told us at dinner of old Ferdinand I, Tsar of Bulgaria. Ferdinand was the successor to Alexander, Prince of Bulgaria, who belonged to the family that was once German and named Battenberg, and is now English and named Mountbatten. Tsar Ferdinand of Koburg-Kohary, when I saw him at the coronation of Charles IV, the last

king of Hungary, and later at Reinhardt's house in Salzburg, was a tall, heavy man with a pointed beard and piercing eyes. He was an extremely rich, interesting man, an adroit and far from sentimental Balkan politician of his day. At the time when he used to frequent Reinhardt's, he had already gone into retirement, abdicating in favor of his son Boris, who was to be the last king of Bulgaria. Tsar Ferdinand, a former Austrian cavalry officer, was a lover of the Austrian arts, and consequently always attended the Salzburg festivals, which were under Reinhardt's direction. Every time the Tsar came to Salzburg, he would leave his calling card at Reinhardt's chateau, and so was automatically put on the invitation list for Reinhardt's famous supper parties.

More than two hundred guests would often take supper in the big banquet chamber of Reinhardt's chateau (built for a Prince Archbishop of Salzburg in 1736), after the opening of an opera or play at the festival. They would sit at numerous round tables in the tremendous banquet chamber, which sharp tongued Vienna newspapermen used to call a rococo railroad station. There was almost always Hungarian goulash with noodles in big silver bowls, by way of emphasizing Reinhardt's Hungarian citizenship. Aside from this regular dish on his festive menus, Reinhardt—who understood not a word of Hungarian, for all his Hungarian citizenship—had only one other tie binding him to Hungary—his best, perhaps his only friend was the late Budapest attorney Dr. Miksa Márton, who was also a friend of Wanda's and mine.

At the supper parties the whole chateau was lit by hun-

dreds of old-fashioned wax tapers made expressly for Reinhardt, reinforced by hidden electric lights.

Of course Tsar Ferdinand was always invited to these celebrations. By order of Rudolf Kommer, the New York writer, who was major-domo of Reinhardt's chateau during the festival for many years, the list of invited guests was presented to Tsar Ferdinand so that he might choose his table companions. The whole affair sounds now like a medieval fairy-tale and indeed the parties used to look like it. On the invitation list, along with internationally celebrated playwrights, painters, composers, actors, and producers of various countries, were sons of the German emperor; Hapsburg archdukes; the Roumanian royal family; the regent of Yugoslavia; the royal family of Greece; the Crown Princess of Italy with her ladies-in-waiting; English lords with their families; French counts and marquises; such great American families as the Harrimans, Goulds, Astors, Vanderbilts, and Rockefellers; Austrian and Hungarian aristocrats; the rich Jewish bankers like the Rothschilds, Bleichroders, Mendelssohns, Castiglioni, and Otto H. Kahn of New York; the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna; the Archbishop of Salzburg and other German bishops; the priors of the Benedictine Order; a quantity of diplomats and cabinet ministers from Europe and America; a few Indian maharajahs and so forth.

Out of all this list Tsar Ferdinand cheerfully and unhesitatingly chose as his table companions the comedian Max Pallenberg and his wife Fritz Massary, the popular Berlin operetta prima donna.

"Would Your Majesty like anyone besides these two at table?"

"Not for the world!"

So the three sat at a little table in a corner until dawn; and afterward they always did so every August.

Reinhardt did not like His Majesty at all. The reason was that Reinhardt had once read in the paper how at the very moment when Stambulov, Ferdinand's talented anti-Russian prime minister, was being assassinated for political reasons, a man in the Tsar's company looked at his watch, saying, "*Je crois que M. Stambulov vient d'avoir un moment désagréable,*" and Ferdinand accepted the remark without batting an eye. Nevertheless Reinhardt could not leave him off the invitation list.

Despite all these guests, Reinhardt was no snob; indeed he was the very opposite of a snob. He grew nervous and felt positively unwell in such company. His great banquet chamber had a gallery at second floor level. Often when all the guests were assembled he would go up into the gallery, hide behind a pillar, and stand long and melancholically surveying the bustle below. We asked him why he gave these magnificent soirées when he did not enjoy them and was at ease only in Bohemian company.

He said that in the modern world the kind of theater he ran—presentations of the highest class, with fabulously paid actors, using splendid sets designed by the best artists, a theater where work, time, and money were no object—could not possibly be put on a business basis. "I have no rich emperor backing me the way Franz Joseph used to pay for the Vienna Burgtheater and the Opera out of

his own pocket," he said, "or the way the Russian Tsar used to have his ballet, or the new Russian revolutionary government its Stanislavsky, Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, and Meyerhold. I'm a private citizen, almost always in financial difficulties. As an actor I could easily make money enough to live comfortably. But if I pursue my ideal, as I do, and keep trying to realize my dream of an artistic theater, then I have to depend on the support of vain, rich bankers, influential dignitaries, and the prosperous 'art-loving' aristocracy. That doesn't mean my heart belongs to them. My heart belongs to the theater, and that's why Tsar Ferdinand enjoys the high honor of dipping goulash out of the same bowl at the same table with the best actors in my house."

¶ (The following is a scene that took place at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. It was one of Max Reinhardt's favorite instances whenever he was discussing the question, so often raised in theatrical circles, of how a stage director should talk to actors at rehearsals in order to make himself unmistakably plain. Reinhardt was against directors who made long, theoretical speeches to an actor. "This short story," Reinhardt used to say, "even though it is a rude caricature of an answer to a very delicate question, calls for no comment. If I should ever have to lecture at a dramatic school on the art of directing, I'd begin the course by telling of this scene."

The scene that Reinhardt so often recounted took place between the greatest German dramatist of the nineteenth century, Gerhart Hauptmann, and the actress Lia Rosen,

one morning at Reinhardt's theater. Miss Rosen was one of the first actresses to play the title role in Hauptmann's *Hannele*. The dress rehearsal was attended by the dramatist, then absolutely idolized in Germany. Actors and director alike were correspondingly excited.

After the rehearsal Hauptmann accompanied Reinhardt up from the auditorium to the stage in order to discuss with the actors what he did and did not like, what was to stay in, and what was to be changed. The play, which has since become a classic, is made up of the feverish dreams of a poor, sick girl, who finally dies and goes to heaven. While Hauptmann was expressing his wishes, therefore, Lia Rosen lay propped up on one elbow in the bed where she had to lie throughout the play.

Hauptmann finally turned to Lia Rosen and said, "In your fevered dream, when you cry out, 'Mother! Mother!', it should be on a note of melancholy yearning, as if you wanted to call for your mother, who is already up in heaven, to help you over. Look up; put into your voice all the terrified yearning in the tormented heart of a poor, dying orphan . . ."

And Hauptmann went on describing in ever greater detail the tone he required for this cry of anguish. He elaborated with such poetic eloquence and in such touching phrases that some of the actors who were listening began to wipe away tears. Then even Reinhardt took out his handkerchief. Finally moisture glistened in all eyes. There was a dead silence when Hauptmann finished talking.

At this moment of exalted stillness Lia Rosen asked the author, "All right . . . If you don't mind . . . *Louder*, or *softer*?"

¶ "M. calls this the 'kindest joke' anyone has ever told him in New York. When our friend Billy Rose the producer was showing us his house on Beekman Place, M. told him after we had inspected the nice, cozy room occupied by the cheerfully smiling butler, 'If I'm ever broke, I'm going to ask you for the butler's job.'

"Billy returned, 'I shan't be able to accommodate you.'

" 'Why not?' M. asked.

" 'Because,' said Billy, 'unless I'm broke, you can't be broke. And if I'm broke, I shan't be able to afford a butler.' "

¶ "M's internationally best known and most performed play is *Liliom*, first produced in America by the Theatre Guild in 1921 with Joseph Schildkraut and Eva Le Gallienne, revived in 1940 by Vinton Freedley with Burgess Meredith and Ingrid Bergman. *Liliom*, about which Brooks Atkinson wrote in the *New York Times* after the 1940 revival: 'In case you remember *Liliom* as one of the most beautiful plays of our time you need not revise your opinion now,' had been a pronounced flop thirty-one years before, at its Budapest premiere in 1909. In fact many of the first-nighters indignantly left the theater before the final curtain. The following day M's family upbraided him, saying, 'That's what comes of writing your play in a noisy café.'

"M. says he felt appropriately guilty until the day when he read that Henrik Ibsen, whom he profoundly admired,

often did his work at cafés. This legend of Ibsen arose at the period when his dramas were riding a mighty wave of fashion; the story was often found in literary gossip articles in the German papers. M. says he heaved a sigh of relief when he read it. But his satisfaction was short-lived.

“One day a Danish literary agent by the name of Folmer Hansen, who handled, among many others, M’s first plays in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, came to Budapest and called on M. Hansen had known Ibsen personally. Questioned about Ibsen’s café writing (then a common habit among authors in Paris and Vienna as well), Hansen made a surprising reply. He said that Norwegian tourist guides, showing groups of visitors the sights of their capital, Christiania (now Oslo), used to take the tourists to the big glass windows of certain cafés and point out the celebrated Ibsen at work. First from the street outside, then at a respectful distance inside the café, the tourists would gape reverentially at the bespectacled old gentleman, with the characteristic heavy white side whiskers and no mustache, busily at work. Hansen declared that these ‘Ibsens’ were actually to be seen at several different cafés in the tourist season, invariably with eye-glasses, thick white side whiskers, and no mustache. They were always deep in thought, busily writing. They were theatrical extras, hired for a modest fee by the cafés to sit at the window, assiduously scrawling one sheet of paper full after another.”

§ (Wanda, like me, was very fond of France and the French. As a young student I devoured hundreds of vol-

umes of good French literature, beginning with Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*. In Paris I was positively awe-stricken when I attended the lectures of Professors Leroy-Beaulieu and Henri Bergson at the Collège de France, and Roland Napoléon Bonaparte at the Société de Géographie, and I passed—though by the skin of my teeth—several examinations on the Code Napoléon at the University of Geneva when I was still planning to be a lawyer. I gave Wanda most of the great novels to read, and in 1938 she studied French language and literature at the same Geneva University. Neither of us could abide hearing Germans criticize France in our presence, which often happened. Once a refugee here in New York was damning the French authorities, and of course France as well, because, while he was admitted to France on his escape from Germany, he was held up by bureaucratic obstruction at the frontier.

"May I tell him," asked Wanda, "what you told me at the station in Nice when you came out of the chief of police's office?" And she told what had happened.

I had gone to the office to apply for a three years' residence permit. This gentleman was not the chief of police, he was higher up. He was the ranking official in Nice of the *Sûreté Nationale*, which corresponded roughly to the F.B.I. in America. His was an important and ticklish job in those days of international tension just before the war. Spy-infested Nice and its environs were perilously close to the frontier of an already hostile Italy. Although he outranked the city police, his offices were not in the headquarters building, but rather mysteriously in an inconspicuous suite by the railway station, with no sign or nameplate.

Wanda waited in the corridor for me while I was inside. When I came out, I told her that the chief had received me very kindly and had written an endorsement of my application to the Ministry of the Interior.

As soon as my business was done, I told her, he hurriedly got up and begged my pardon because he must leave at once. As I went out, he called after me, "I've got to go up into the mountains before it gets dark. I've just had a phone call that Mussolini's police have expelled another couple of hundred Jews from Italy, and they're shivering up there on the icy Alpine peaks where the boundary is. A regiment of our *Chasseurs Alpins* is stationed up there. The Jews have neither passports nor visas, so our soldiers can't let them into France. The regiment of *Alpini* that's entrenched opposite us won't let them back into Italy. Orders are orders on both sides of the frontier. So these Jews are left dangling in the no man's land between the lines.

"The French and Italian soldiers have been feeding them for days from their own rations. I'm going up now with some trucks and bring the poor devils down to Nice. I've arranged quarters and food for them here. I really ought to demand their passports and visas. They have neither. I don't care about papers; it's a matter of innocent, persecuted human beings." This was what he said, and that very day he did it. His full official title was *Commissaire Divisionnaire, Chef des Services de Police Spéciale de la Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale*. His name was Hervé Bourdon.)

§ "We've been with an old, old friend of M's, Sándor Nádas, who was a newspaperman in the days when M. was a war correspondent. M. reminded him of a little occurrence they had both witnessed in the fall of 1914. The first wounded Russian prisoners of war were just being brought back from the northern battlefields to Budapest. The first trainload of wounded Russians arrived in the early dawn at four o'clock. The newspapermen were waiting around in the station. The stretchers with the wounded were set up in a long line in the square outside the station; the ambulances were waiting on the other side.

"The chief ambulance surgeon walked along the row of stretchers, deciding which patient was to go to which hospital. The wounded Russian prisoners looked at the chief doctor in terror. Their officers, to keep them from surrendering, had warned them on the battlefield that the Hungarians executed all prisoners of war. And the chief doctor, walking along the stretcher line, was a portly giant with a big black beard, with formidable, piercing eyes behind thick spectacles. He was a universally popular figure in Budapest, a kind-hearted and jovial fellow, but judging by his looks alone it was no wonder the Tsar's poor Russian peasants thought he was Jack Ketch. The newspapermen walked along behind the doctor. A Russian private on one of the stretchers, catching sight of the doctor, sat up, frightened out of his wits, and began to wail pitifully for mercy.

"M's above-mentioned friend, the newspaperman, was suddenly moved to pity for the terrified Russian. 'For heaven's sake,' he said, 'we've got to show this poor man

he has nothing to fear!' But nobody there could speak Russian. 'Somehow we'll have to show our friendship and good will,' said the journalist, going over to the Russian, encouraging him with a most kindly smile, and slapping him cordially on the shoulder.

"To this gesture of kindness the Russian replied with a piercing scream. That was the shoulder with the bullet in it. M. says he learned 'something altogether new' at that moment: it isn't enough to be kind, you also have to be lucky."

(It has nothing to do with that story, but I remember on this occasion telling Wanda and the above-mentioned friend that shortly afterward I experienced something else "altogether new" in the Croatian village of Mitrovitz, behind the southern front. After the battle a soldier was pointed out to me strutting proudly with a necklace of human eyes on a string around his neck like pearls.)

§ (I have picked out of Wanda's collection a chapter of my diary as a war correspondent that the World War I censor cut out of the book published in 1916. In 1943 it appeared in the *New York Post* when I was Leonard Lyons' "guest columnist."

The story was entitled *The Fly on the Wall*, and ran as follows:

The staff of the Austro-Hungarian army corps to which I was attached as a war correspondent in 1915 had the reputation of maintaining an excellent cuisine. For months throughout the hot summer the army lay idle, dug in on one of the salients in Russia. Days passed, without

so much as the bark of a cannon. The staff officers read novels, wrote lengthy letters, and staged races.

And the food kept getting better all the time. There were two tables in the officers' mess; a large table, seating 35 "little people," and a smaller one, presided over by the commanding general, where ten of the headquarters staff took their meals, with myself as a guest. The food was good at the large table too; but the general's small table easily vied with the most famous hostelrys in Vienna.

Seated beside me at the table was a young lieutenant, who represented the sardonic philosophy of life in that small and select gathering. He had no end of fun over my mercurious habit of keeping a diary. One day, he said to me at dinner:

"Here's one for your diary. The reason our food is so delectable is that we have two cooks, both of whom are in dread of dying. By cooking so well they hope to do all their soldiering in the kitchen, and so avoid the battle front."

We had cake every Sunday. One of our two cooks was a pastry cook by trade. Evidently he feared death more than the other; for he outshone himself. The most amazing architectural condiments rose in splendor over his pastries. Once it was a church, complete with tiny gothic towers. Another time a sculptured hunting scene, with woods, hunter and deer made of sugar. Then, again, a castle, with lighted casements, and a live bird in the turret, that flew away as we raised the roof. But the crowning glory of all was a gutted sugar facsimile of the famous fortress of Przemysl, shot to near rubble, and livid with

flames. The General was ecstatic. We ate Przemysl, extinguished the lighted brandy, and drank it. The cook was at the peak of his career and personal security. The lieutenant whispered in my ear:

"Put this in your diary: Guaranteed effective against danger of death in time of war, a live bird, sealed in a candy tower."

Then the following happened. The chief of our corps staff, Col. Count L., a conceited, haughty, rather obtuse aristocrat, had a beautiful big dog he dearly loved. The dog had a repertory of all sorts of tricks; but the Colonel was particularly proud of the way the dog would leap to an amazing height and snap if shown a fly on the wall. The dog did this with such lightning speed that the fly never had a chance to get away. This was one of our daily diversions throughout the long lull.

On my way to dinner one day I saw a sizeable crowd outside the officers' mess. Young officers, in a body, were laughing aloud. Stepping up beside them, I saw that the dog kept lunging without letup at a big fly, high up on the wall, without, however, downing it, even though the fly itself never flew away. Leaning against the wall, our famous pastry cook kept calling to the dog: "Snap the fly!"

The joke was, simply, that the fly was no real fly. The pastry cook had drawn it with his pencil, well up on the whitewashed wall. The fly had a head, wings, and six feet. The dog had made many futile leaps after the fly. He was half dead with exhaustion. The officers laughed, the dog leaped time and again, as the cook called, "Snap the fly!"

All at once, there was an end to the laughter. The

Colonel had come and seen. He called the dog, trembling with excitement and fatigue. The Colonel's face was livid with rage; his eyes shot out glints of lightning. He looked straight at the stiffly saluting pastry cook, and said:

"You are an idiot!"

There was a deadly silence.

The Colonel was carrying a short riding crop. It shook in his hand now—no more than a tuning fork responding to a tap, but all understood what had flashed through the Colonel's mind for an instant.

About a week later, an order came from the High Command, calling for a complete list of all expendables currently attached to army staffs, and their immediate transfer to the front lines. Shortly afterward, our artistic, elaborate pastries came to a sudden end. Said the lieutenant:

"To be entered in your diary: Most dangerous to life and limb in time of war is the act of drawing flies, in pencil, on house walls."

If I were writing a short story, instead of quoting my diary, I might end by having the pastry cook killed in action. The truth, however, is that I've lost track of him completely. Moreover, I am mindful of Maeterlinck's admonition, contained in the preface to one of his books:

"The author ought never yield to the temptation to enlarge upon the truly wondrous by miracles of his own invention.")

9 (A journalist who was writing an article about me asked for information on my Hungarian friends; at my

request and with my help Wanda made him some notes. Of these the journalist used only a few. Skimming through the list, I put it down here with annotations, largely my own, omitting names mentioned elsewhere in this book.)

"I have known many of M's best Hungarian friends. I call those best whom M. still speaks of most tenderly, and who were the most helpful to him in the tribulations of life. But there are also many, particularly of the best, whom I did not know personally. Unfortunately I never knew his very best friend of all, the late Andor Miklós, who still occupies the first place in his heart today. The two of them worked together as penniless young newspapermen on the *Pesti Napló* daily. Later Miklós made himself a great career. As publisher of *Az Est* (with a circulation of over half a million in little Hungary!) he became M's boss, and sent him to World War I as a correspondent. Later, when Miklós acquired the large Hungarian book publishing concern, Athenaeum, and its splendid printing plant, he issued M's novels and plays.

"A good friend of both in the early years was Alexander Mester, city editor of the *Pesti Napló*, for which paper M. wrote editorials, short stories, and satirical columns. (M. afterward used Mester unmistakably as a character in his 1918 novel *Andor*, which can safely be called autobiographical.) Mester is a very severe critic of public life in Hungary, and incidentally a very lonely, original man, of implacably high moral principles.

"M. says that these two friends of his provided the toughness and stamina his own nature lacked at the time of his two divorces and three marriages, in order to con-

front his enemies and alleged friends—that is to say, the familiar difficulties of life.

"M. recalls with gratitude his first editor in chief, the late Sándor Braun, who hired him at the age of eighteen as a reporter on the *Budapesti Napló*, later sent him to Rome to attend and write a long story on a solemn high mass conducted by Pope Leo XIII, then almost ninety, at St. Peter's Basilica, and still later printed M's first satirical dialogues about the social life of Budapest.

"These brief dialogues attracted the attention of the then director of the Hungarian National (state) Theater, Ladislás Beöthy, who with very little ado sent an advance of two hundred *koronas* (forty dollars) to M., a perfect stranger, against royalties on a comedy that M. was to write for him. M., also without much ado, promptly wrote *The Lawyer*. It was produced in Budapest in 1902, M's first play. By that time, however, Beöthy was no longer manager of the National Theater. But they remained good friends until Beöthy's untimely death. Beöthy was generally recognized as the one true genius of the theater in Hungary. You might say he had discovered a whole anonymous generation of playwrights, composers, directors, actors, and actresses, and brought them forward to success.

"I never knew personally, but only from stage appearances, M's outstanding friend Gyula Hegedüs, whom his contemporaries consider the greatest Hungarian actor of his time. He created the leading part in M's above mentioned first play, and later, with a few exceptions, in all his plays. Hegedüs taught a whole generation of actors the simple, naturalistic style (very rarely did he use any

make-up on the stage); he died in the midst of his successes, after little more than a few hours' illness.

"I also never knew M's composer friend Pongrác Kaesóh. Kaesóh was a mathematics teacher at a high school until Beöthy discovered him and gave him, too, an advance. Kaesóh thereupon wrote the music for the most successful musical play in the history of the Hungarian theater, the folk story *Janos Vitéz (Hero John)*. So small as Hungary is, the play enjoyed several thousand performances. In Budapest alone it was performed over eight hundred times, with the leading part taken by Miss Sári Fedák, later—very briefly—M's second wife.

"On the other hand I did know well among M's circle of Budapest friends the journalist Flenér Szegő and his wife (both of them characters in his novel *The Green Hussar*), the publisher János Kallós, the revered author and playwright Jeno Heltai, the humorist Adorján Stella, M's childhood pal Jeno Ferks, the late beloved Dr. Miksa Márton (who M. declared played the piano almost as well as Horowitz, only he would never make a public appearance), and above all, our dear, good, lamented Lóri Barabás, the perennial lover of newspaperdom, who introduced M. and me in 1911.

"Among M's earliest boyhood friends I know Alexander Korda (who once belonged, with M., to the penniless young newspapermen of Budapest) from our days in southern France. I met and grew attached to that excellent painter Rodolphe Kiss, already celebrated for his portraits in Korda's and M's early days, here in New York. (While here he did a very interesting portrait of M.) The Budapest, subsequently Viennese, and since then for dec-

ades New York publisher Ferenc Göndör I first met on my arrival in New York harbor aboard the liner *Rex*."

9 "It was my job to keep in mind two little anecdotes, which I would remind M. of in a whisper as necessary, because he likes to tell them whenever the conversation turns on the Pope. We heard both stories in Venice. M. is an admirer of the predecessor of the present Pope. He had even seen him in Vienna; his name at that time was Achille Ratti. Later, as Pope Pius XI, Ratti fought passionately against Hitler, though he was already very old and mortally ill.

"The first story dates from the time of a great international convention of journalists at Rome. When the convention was over, Pope Pius XI gave a simultaneous audience to all three-hundred-odd journalists, who had gathered from every part of the globe. The journalists were drawn up in a semicircle in a large chamber of the Vatican. Pius XI, then close to eighty, passed along the semicircle, speaking a few amiable words to the journalists. When finally the great door was opened for the Pope to retire, he stopped, lifted up his hands, and blessed the group. There were a good many Jews present. The Christian, or as they were then called, Aryan, members looked quizzically at the Jews. The Jews smiled uncomfortably. This brief dumbshow did not escape the Pope. Before he retired, he paused again on the threshold, turned, and said with a wise, modest smile, 'My children, an old man's blessing never did anyone any harm.'

"The other story is likewise of a surprising remark by

ne Pope. He, or rather the Vatican, had among a financial adviser of the Jewish persuasion, a well- and distinguished Venetian banker. The banker went to Rome on financial business for the Vatican, ever failed, before returning to Venice, to ask audience of the Pope in order to take his leave of the Holy

one such audience the Pope said to him, 'You're back to Venice now. My very good friend the Patriarch of Venice is ill.' (The archbishops of Venice bear the ecclesiastical title of Patriarch.)

'I have asked for daily reports,' the Pope went on, 'of his condition. But still I would like you to call on him and tell him how much concerned I am for his health, and give my blessing to him.'

The banker stated, 'Holy Father,' he said, embarrassed, 'how can a Jew convey a papal blessing to the Patriarch?'

The Pope leaned forward and whispered confidentially in his ear, 'The merchandise I send him through your hands. Superior that I don't care how it's packed.' "

Another of the jobs I gave Wanda was to keep in the honor Franz Joseph I. bestowed when he decided to drop a few casual words about me. In my first letter of writing, one of my friends was the sculptor Giovanni Stanetti. The Hungarian government once commissioned Stanetti to do a bust of Franz Joseph, King of Hungary, for some public building. When the king soon

afterward came from Vienna to Budapest, he visited the sculptor's studio to sit for his portrait. His Majesty often did such things in order to display his graciousness toward the fine arts in Hungary. When sitting, old Franz Joseph would talk to the artist as little as possible. This time was no exception; he addressed only a few words to the sculptor. He asked, "How are the Hungarian sculptors doing?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty," was the answer, "pretty well."

"And the painters?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty, likewise."

"And . . . how about literature?"

Ligeti wanted to improve the opportunity of mentioning me, his friend, to the king.

"We have," he said, "a young writer, Molnar, who is a promising lad."

A brief pause followed. Then Franz Joseph opened his mouth. The sculptor expected him to say, "I'd like to read something by the young man." But His Apostolic Majesty, the Emperor and King, Europe's richest monarch, Ligeti told me, remarked with a cutting undertone of reproach, as if he disliked the idea, "I hear he's making money."

Fifteen years later, as a war correspondent in World War I, I once lost my way in East Galicia, and through pure carelessness most unwillingly strayed to the bank of the Zlota Lipa River that was under bombardment by Russian artillery. General Peter Hofmann's chauffeur picked me up in his car, and rushed me back to our line of trenches.

Some weeks later the king conferred on me the Officer's

Cross of his Order of Franz Joseph, with the ribbon of the Cross of Military Merit.)

¶ "One of the times when I did not agree at all with M. Sometimes his judgment is not cool enough, as you might say. Not infrequently an interesting and original train of thought makes such an impression on him that he will accept it even when his intelligence knows better.

"This is what it was. M. was recently invited to one of the famous dinners given by old Fred Muschenheim, the owner of the Hotel Astor. He knows the Muschenheims from his Venetian days, and thinks very highly of them. The Muschenheims—the greatest Toscanini fans in New York, incidentally—are of German origin, but hundred-per-cent Americans. Most of the guests at their dinners are prominent anti-Hitler émigrés and ferocious American anti-Nazis.

"This too was a big party, including, besides musical greats like Horowitz, Bruno Walter, Barbirolli, Fritz Kreisler, Fritz Busch, Emanuel List, and so on, Thomas Mann's interesting and learned daughter Erika, and among other German expatriate celebrities a gentleman who had belonged to Hitler's intimate political circle during the first years after the Fuehrer seized power. This gentleman saw through Hitler's game in time, grew to hate Nazism, left Germany, and fled to America, where he is agitating against the Nazis. Among other things he wrote a book against Hitler.

"The debate started at table, springing from a tiny detail. First the talk was about the destruction of Lidice

village, and then about the murder of Heydrich, Himmler's hangman, in retaliation for whose death Hitler, as is well-known, ordered the destruction of Lidice and the extermination of its people. Erika Mann said she had once seen this man Heydrich somewhere in Germany. She mentioned that unless her memory was at fault, Heydrich had green eyes. The aforementioned German anti-Hitlerite, who had known Heydrich well, maintained that the hangman had blue eyes. 'Not only had he blue eyes,' he said, 'but they were beautiful, soft blue eyes, and in fact his whole expression—incredible as it may sound now—was that of a gentle, innocent, blue-eyed romantic.'

"Sarcastic and bitter smiles on all sides accompanied the great silence that followed upon these words of Hitler's foe. He went on, 'Believe me, not only his expression and his manners were gentle, but it would be hard to say anything of him that would indicate wickedness in a private individual. Heydrich was one of the fiercest doctrinaire Nazi fanatics. That was the really terrible thing about these people. Personally they could not have killed anybody. But practically every day they would hear Hitler, Goebbels, Rosenberg, Himmler, Goering screeching their fanatical, almost religious theories about races that ought to be exterminated, and this gradually got into their very bones. Afterward, when they were among themselves, instead of talking about murder and bloodshed, they would take paper and pencil like cold-blooded mathematicians, with deadly serious faces, and draw up statistics on the 'Reduction of undesirable races', intoxicated as they were with the possibility of world domination for their own adored and exalted race. They calcu-

lated on the basis of scientific statistics how many Slavs, Jews, and what they called Negroid Italians ought to be exterminated in order to attain their 'sacred purpose' as quickly as possible. I emphasize that I am only talking of exceptions, that is of the few leading personalities, not of the great, corrupt, sadistic majority of Nazi leaders. Since the Nazi doctrine had become a true religion with these few fools, we may call the race-killing fanaticism of these madmen a sort of religious insanity. Those people issued their murder decrees not out of human vileness, but out of mania, founded upon a 'world-saving' dogma. In their relationships to their friends, families, and in general to individuals they were not evil, paradoxical as it may sound. I knew them well.'

"Roughly these words are what M. remembered from the analytical study of the hangman's innocent blue eyes. M. said that the statement interested him as a writer, in other words as a professional soul-searcher, and that he, along with a few of the other guests, was not inclined to disagree with this analysis of the hangman, as the judgment of a personal acquaintance.

"I violently disapproved because M. did not instantly attack the whole train of thought on the spot. Unfortunately, I was not present, but I am convinced that this product of the German's brain was obviously nothing but an effort to show off his knowledge of mankind before a group that respected him. No one in his right senses can maintain that even such demonstrably sincere religious fanatics as the popes and canonized grand inquisitors who tortured and burned heretics were not evil as 'private individuals' or 'human beings.' "

§ "At Montauk, Long Island, a very pleasant old gentleman came over to our table in the restaurant. Frank Crowninshield. He was at one time M's boss on *Vanity Fair* magazine, where M. for a time had an article in every issue. Mr. Crowninshield is one of the most distinguished elderly men I have seen in America. They recalled an old memory. M. told how his articles first got into *Vanity Fair*.

"An article once appeared in *Vanity Fair*, dealing with M's divorce proceedings. M's American friends considered the article libellous, and indeed downright harmful to M., whose plays were appearing on Broadway at the time. So Dr. Edmond Pauker, M's New York agent, went to the managing editor, Donald Freeman, to demand redress or at least some sort of correction. Dr. Pauker explained that this article had injured M. as an author in the eyes of the American public.

" 'It won't damage him,' said Mr. Freeman, 'and I'll prove it to you right away.'

" 'How so?' asked Dr. Pauker.

" 'Very simply indeed,' said Mr. Freeman. 'I hereby order from Mr. Molnar through your agency a series of twelve articles to appear in the next twelve issues of *Vanity Fair*.'

"Dr. Pauker cabled this offer to M. in Budapest. M. wrote the articles, and all twelve appeared in *Vanity Fair*. Indeed when M. was in New York in the winter of 1927-28, Condé Nast, the publisher of *Vanity Fair*, gave a big party 'to meet Mr. Molnar.' At the party Ina Claire and Leslie Howard played a dialogue of M's that had appeared in *Vanity Fair*.

"M. told me that that evening he saw the most beautiful girl in New York. She was Natica Nast, the daughter of the host. At the same party M. got acquainted with George Gershwin, whom he had always greatly admired, and who sent M. a set of his records and an inscribed photograph, which hung in the studio of M's Budapest apartment until 1931, when M. left Budapest for good."

"M. also recalled to Crowninshield that he and Condé Nast, the bosses of *Vanity Fair*, had got photographs taken of himself and his wife Lili Darvas by Steichen, the leading American photographer. M. and his wife went to Steichen's studio in the morning, where Steichen first took a great many pictures of Lili. M. sat by and smirked while Lili went through the exhausting series of poses. When Steichen finished with Lili, M. got up, supposing it was his turn next.

"'Thank you,' said Steichen, 'I don't need you.'"

"M looked at him in embarrassment.

"Steichen said, 'Half the pictures I took were of you.'"

"M. and Lili left. The pictures were printed as full pages at the beginning of 1928 in *Vanity Fair*. M. still has them in his files. It is not only my opinion, but that of all his friends, that he has never had such good pictures taken. I felt Steichen was not what you would call a good photographer, he was a true artist."

On the same occasion M. told Mr. Crowninshield that he had heard from David Belasco, the great producer, which he had used in a book, the story of an Indian who had heard an American speaking English and right afterwards in French.

'Please,' said the Indian, 'open your mouth.'

The American opened wide.

'Thank you,' said the Indian.

'Why did you want me to open my mouth?' asked the American.

The Indian replied, 'I wanted to see if you had two mouths.'

According to M. the Indian was right. 'You need two mouths to speak two languages,' he said gloomily."

On the same trip to America in 1927, on December 12, to be exact—M. recalled this memorable date—he was given the honor of being received by President Calvin Coolidge in his office at the White House. He was accompanied on the trip by his friend Gilbert Miller, not as a friend but as an interpreter. The train arrived in Washington in the morning. So they paid a call on Frank B. Rowland, a friend of Miller's, who was just at breakfast.

Among other things, Mr. Morse offered M. a cup of coffee with a delicious aroma. 'This is the first good coffee I have had in America,' said M. Mr. Morse remarked dryly: 'Every month I send for a few pounds to Meinl in Vienna.' After they had paid their respects to the president they were invited to lunch with Count László Széchenyi, the Hungarian envoy, whose wife was Gladys Vanderbilt.



After lunch Countess Széchenyi and her daughters made delicious coffee in the living-room with a glass coffee-maker.

" 'This is the second time I've had good coffee in America,' said M., to which Gladys Vanderbilt replied: 'We get in from Meinel's in Vienna.' "

"When M. happened to be telling this otherwise trifling story, which he saw as only a small coincidence, here in New York recently, one of his listeners, a gentleman in an important economic position, observed that the story might be used to defend the principle of free enterprise if a simple, popular example were wanted. 'There is no substitute,' he said, 'for an able tradesman. Though Napoleon did say that things are never done right unless you do them yourself, the man who wants to drink a few cups of good coffee every day usually has better things to do than to seek out the best coffee plantations, discover the ablest coffee planter, the best packer and shipper, the most expert-coffee-roaster and grinder, all so that afterward he may enjoy a sip of a fragrant demitasse. As you see, it's enough to have the address of an honest and capable tradesman. He saves us all that worry and work, for a bit of profit. Or else, more important, he saves us from a powerful government official in charge, God help us, of a nationalized central coffee bureau, where we would have to make application and of course in consequence to wrangle with him, eventually getting poor coffee for our good money.' "

"When we went home afterward, M. remarked how characteristic it was of the present day, filled with tension and fear, that not even such a simple, silly little story

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"According to M. the Indian was right. 'You need two tongues to speak two languages,' he said gloomily."

¶ "On the same trip to America in 1927, on December 22, to be exact M. recalled this memorable date, he enjoyed the honor of being received by President Calvin Coolidge in his office at the White House. He was accompanied on the trip by his friend Gilbert Miller, not only as a friend but as an interpreter. The train arrived too early in the morning. So they paid a call on Frank Morse, a friend of Miller's, who was just at breakfast.

"Among other things, Mr. Morse offered M. a cup of coffee with a delicious aroma. 'This is the first good coffee I've had in America,' said M. Mr. Morse remarked dryly 'Every month I send for a few pounds to Meinl in Vienna. When they had paid their respects to the president they were invited to lunch with Count László Széchenyi, the Hungarian envoy, whose wife was Gladys Vanderbilt

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"When we went home afterward, M. remarked how characteristic it was of the present day, filled with tension and fear, that not even such a simple, silly little story

could be told without somebody's drawing a high-level economic moral from it, either leftward or rightward."

¶ "M. told me that his reception by President Coolidge went off nearly according to White House etiquette. An official threw open the door of the Oval Room, looked inside and shouted: 'The Minister of Hungary and guest!' He slammed the door almost angrily. M. and the minister went in. The president offered them a seat and asked M. a series of insignificant questions, interrupted by long, painful pauses. M. knew not a word of English at the time. This time Count Széchenyi was the interpreter, translating the president's questions and M's replies. Coolidge's last question—Hungary was in the grip of a severe post-war depression—was: 'How are economic conditions in Hungary?'

M. knows very little about economics, and was afraid he might ignorantly say something that would do some serious harm to his native country. So, turning to Count Széchenyi, he said in Hungarian, 'I'm going to talk to you in Hungarian for some time, so that the president will think I'm answering his question. But I don't dare answer him, because I'm completely ignorant of economic matters. And I'm afraid I may say something stupid that will do a lot of harm. I shan't say anything, but I'd like you to tell the president something that will help our country. I think I've said enough now so that the president will believe I've answered his question. Please be kind enough to tell him whatever you have to say.'

"Count Széchenyi did not bat an eyelash, but delivered

a reply, measured by the length of M's speech, something helpful—I believe about a loan to Hungary. At the end of their talk, the president turned to M., and said, "Thank you, it was very interesting."

"This was not the end of the interview. Coolidge addressed a further question to Széchenyi: 'Please ask Mr. Molnar what he does for a living.'"

¶ "Gilbert Miller came to see us the other day. I made coffee for him. They were talking again about the 1927 visit, the trip to Washington, and the reception by the president. They talked about how the visit to President Coolidge ended. When they came out from seeing the president, the photographers stopped them in the White House garden. Probably a dozen photographers lined up when M., Miller, and Count Széchenyi came out. They motioned to the three to stand in a row with M. in the middle. But Count Széchenyi, who took pride in being descended from one of the greatest historic families of Hungarian aristocrats, was annoyed by the way the photographers peremptorily gestured him around.

"First to M. in Hungarian, and then to the photographers in English, he made a sharp remark about the camera men.

"The photographers ignored him, but the following morning the picture appeared with Count Széchenyi cropped off."

¶ “Two interesting guests dropped in at Room 835 in the Hotel Plaza. Early in the afternoon came one of M’s oldest American acquaintances, George Middleton, the author, playwright, and former president of the Dramatists’ Guild—a tall, dapper, wordly wise old gentleman, freighted with interesting literary and political memories. Mr. Middleton lives in Washington, but often comes to New York, and never fails at such times to call on M. They exchange reminiscences. After the first World War they met in Vienna, Budapest, and in 1927 even in New York. Even now they still talk about their old favorite subject, the problems of international copyright. M. too was once president of the Hungarian Playwrights’ Society, and later became honorary chairman. (He does not know whether he still is.) Mr. Middleton is working on a book of memoirs, which he says will include his conversations with M.

“Our second caller came in the evening—Ray Goetz, a kind and dear friend, the only true globe trotter we know. We have met this smart, wordly, travel minded American in practically every big city in Europe. Naturally M. and Ray also talk over their memories, all occurrences that took place when I was still a schoolgirl.

“One odd thing happened during Ray’s call. I heard myself reminding them both of a story. In 1922 Ray Goetz and his friend Gilbert Miller, the producer, went to Budapest to see a performance of M’s *The Swan*, which is said to have been one of the best Hungarian productions of its time. The leading parts were taken by great artists from the palmy days of the Hungarian stage—outstanding actors and actresses, none of them now living. M. was

away from Budapest, staging one of his plays in Berlin or Vienna. The afternoon before Miller and Goetz went to see *The Swan*, they were at the Hotel Ritz with several Budapest managers and playwrights.

"One of these playwrights, who could by no means be called a well-wisher of M's (in this the man was not alone in Budapest), made a nasty remark when Miller and Goetz spoke well of M's plays. The malicious playwright said to the two Americans, 'Yes, of course M. used to write tolerable plays, but lately he's been writing poor stuff because he drinks too much; he guzzles brandy all night.'

"The two Broadwayites said not a word; they merely received the information with regret. That evening they went to the theater. Before the night was over Miller had acquired the right to produce the play in New York. (He put it on a year later, with Eva Le Gallienne playing the lead.)

"The day after the Budapest performance, as Goetz and Miller were setting off for the station, while the bell-boys piled the baggage into a car, they met in the hotel lobby the playwright who had spoken so unkindly about M. and his brandy the day before.

" 'Well?' asked the playwright. 'Did you see Molnar's new play last night?'

" 'Yes,' replied Ray Goetz, 'and I'm planning to write a play myself, so I'd like to ask you where I can buy the kind of brandy Molnar drinks.'

"Of course, M. soon heard about this. It happened in 1922. For twenty years M., being unfamiliar with American historical repartee, regarded Ray Goetz's question as

a further proof of his well-known wit and tried-and-true friendship. Only here and now did he learn, from Goetz himself, that the remark was actually a quotation: Lincoln said something of the sort when Grant's enemies made caustic remarks about the general's heavy drinking. Goetz was amazed that M. had not realized for twenty years that he was only quoting a historic joke.

"M. told him, 'If a great man like Grant played the drunkard in the original story, I'm all the more grateful to you for giving me that part in the revival.' "

¶ "We had dinner at Billy Rose the producer's house. We both took a great liking to Billy Rose, who is vital and always full of great plans, and also to his sweet and pretty wife, Eleanor Holm, the swimming champion. There were several celebrities at dinner, Ben Hecht (full of amusing yarns, and a superb story teller); George Kaufman (a thin man who was conspicuously silent all evening, despite his amusing plays); his wife Beatrice (intelligent, serious); Moss Hart (the fashionable playwright, very polite; he struck me as rather like a Parisian writer); Edna Ferber (whose family came from Hungary, impulsive and interested in everything—just the way I would imagine a professional woman writer); George Jessel (friendly and full of witty remarks, and I feel very sure he is a kind-hearted man); Leonard Lyons (the *New York Post* columnist, a modest man who looks younger than his years; I think he was the best hearted person of anyone there); Ray Goetz (the composer and producer, a trifle plump but extremely nice; I knew him in Paris);

Edward G. Robinson (the celebrated film actor who always plays gangster parts. He is passionately in love with his collection of paintings, which it seems, however, gives him not only a great deal of pleasure but a great deal of worry); and a young journalist by the name of O'Brien (who is terribly unhappy because he had to leave Paris, of which he was 'enamored,' as he said). The high point of the evening was Ben Hecht's stories about his experiences as a Chicago newspaperman. Billy Rose has a fine collection of paintings, particularly rich in El Grecos. I learned there that El Greco's real name was Theotocopuli."

§ "We were at Billy Rose's again. Only a few scattered pictures hung on the wall. 'Where are all the others?' Billy replied calmly, 'I had an expert examine them, and he discovered that some of them were "geschmiert" (tampered with).' He made a long pause. Finally he said, 'It wasn't easy, but I got my money back.' Everybody agreed that the real beauty in Billy Rose's house was not the El Grecos and the Rembrandts, but his wife Eleanor, about whom there is nothing fake at all."

§ "We attended Rudolf Kommer's funeral. Mr. Crowninshield made a brief but moving memorial speech."

§ "Our favorite restaurant now is a little Italian place in 58th Street. It's called the Restaurant Mona Lisa. There

are a great many pictures on the walls. There are all kinds of prints and photographs, everything but the Mona Lisa itself. We bought a reproduction of the picture in a Sixth Avenue print shop, got it framed, and gave it to the proprietor of the restaurant. Some of the Italian waiters gaped at it blankly. They had never seen it. They could not understand at all: why should we give a portrait of a pretty woman to the restaurant-owner, who was a married man with a lot of children?"

¶ "A real friend of ours, Sam Jaffe, often comes to lunch with us at the Mona Lisa. Yesterday he brought along his friends Edward G. Robinson and his wife. It was quite moving to see how dearly Robinson loves Sam Jaffe. This pleased both of us particularly."

¶ "I told M. I had seen Henri Bernstein, the successful French dramatist, coming out of the Waldorf Astoria. He's living here as a refugee, a violent opponent of Pétain. I had been told before that many, many years ago M. saw Bernstein's play *La Rafale*, the drama of a gambler. That same night M. telegraphed about the play to a Budapest theater. The manager immediately had it translated and produced under the title of *Baccarat*, with great success. After the Budapest success, the play was produced in Vienna and Berlin and the larger German cities, making a great deal of money for the producers and the author.

"When M. told me about it, he told me also that it was spelled incorrectly in Budapest and Vienna, BACCARAT. The right name of the card game is BACCARA, without a T. There is also a *Baccarat* with a *t*, but this is a French city, where the world-famous Baccarat glass articles are made. The spelling of the two words was constantly being confused all over the world.

"M. had this from a Frenchman whom he also thought highly of as a linguistic authority—de Caillavet, the French comedy-writer, whose plays written in collaboration with Robert de Flers M. translated into Hungarian. De Caillavet's full name was Gaston Arman de Caillavet, and when they met in Paris he told M. that he was always annoyed at seeing his middle name printed not as it should be, *Arman*, but *Armand*, with a *d* on the end. It was in this connection that he mentioned the Baccara-Baccarat confusion."

§ "Today Lynn Fontanne and Ruth Gordon came into the Mona Lisa with Sam Jaffe to lunch. M. was really touched. Lynn Fontanne and her husband Alfred Lunt helped to make M's play *The Guardsman* a success in America. Ruth Gordon played the lead in his play *The Violet*. Miss Gordon is good looking and clever. Miss Fontanne is a miracle of feminine beauty and charm. A single moment was enough to make me an admirer of hers, though I had never seen her on the stage."

§ "One evening recently Ben Hecht spent a little time here with M. He is amazingly smart and witty. I can't tell why, but he impressed me rather like a huge and very well-behaved baby."

§ "This noon at the Mona Lisa we met Sterling North, the critic. He is a widely-read young man. He has written a play that M. thinks interesting. Talking about books, I told him that of all the books I have read in America I liked Lin Yutang's *The Importance of Living* the best.

"The one M. likes best is Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*. He had read it before in a German translation. Now, here, he has read it in English twice in succession, turning straight from the last page back to the first and starting over again. We heard later that this sort of thing is no novelty here, because a great many people will sit twice through a film they have enjoyed."

§ "George Freedley the critic came to the Mona Lisa with Sam Jaffe; he is also the curator of the New York Public Library Theater Collection. A serious, learned young man. The same day Goddard Lieberson, the author and a vice-president of the Columbia Recording Company, and his beautiful young wife Brigitta, whose stage name is Vera Zorina, came into the Mona Lisa. They are two sunny, lovely young people. They are going to be happy. M. and I are fond of them both. We attended their wedding reception, at the apartment of Lily Pons and her husband André Kostelanetz."

¶ "We were invited to Samson Raphaelson's. We saw his plays in German in Vienna. He and his handsome wife and good housewife Dorshka are warm-hearted and cultivated people. Raphaelson talked a lot about Ernst Lubitsch, the famous director, whom he likes and admires, and with whom he usually collaborates in Hollywood. Another guest that evening was Jean Arthur, the excellent and amusing actress, whom I had seen on the screen. She did not say much. But it struck me that she was nervous, and I had an impression she was not happy. I think this is because she is one of the exceptions, a genuine artist. M. was delighted with her. He said to me, 'It's quite seldom in my life that I have liked an actress so well off the stage.'"

¶ "Lili, M's wife, is playing in a theater near here. She is playing the part of Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, in *Hamlet*. I went to the opening, and applauded enthusiastically. It must be a wonderful feeling for a Hungarian actress to play Shakespeare in English in New York.

"Lili has dinner here in M's room between the matinee and the evening performance on Wednesdays and Saturdays, so as not to have to go all the way back to 78th Street. She doesn't even take off her make-up. I always order her dinner at four o'clock, so that at 5:30 she can eat and rush back to the theater at Columbus Circle.

"She speaks with high regard of Maurice Evans, who is playing Hamlet not only as an actor, but as a noble

person and true gentleman. M. brought out again his old favorite theory, that the greater an artist, the greater a gentleman he will be. He always adds that there are only two exceptions, Shakespeare and artists who drink."

¶ "At Montauk we met James W. Gerard. He is past seventy, a lively and enterprising old gentleman. He is a historic figure; it was he, as American ambassador to Berlin in 1917, who presented the American declaration of war to Germany. He told us he was working now on a non-political 'real western' film story."

¶ "In Montauk lives the most beautiful girl in America, with her father, James Montgomery Flagg, the noted illustrator. She is beautiful on the street, but even more so on the beach."

¶ "We went to dinner at the house of Mrs. Clarence Day. She is the widow of the great American writer, the original author of *Life With Father*. Her daughter, the red-headed Wendy Day, is still too young, but in a few years she will be a really handsome girl. Artzybasheff the painter and his wife were also there. He is the son of the Russian writer Mikhail Artzybasheff. I saw his father's drama, *Jealousy*, many years ago in Budapest. Artzybasheff is now doing covers for *Time* magazine and portraits in an original technique."

§ "At Dr. László's I admired Lady Mendl, of Paris, New York, and Hollywood fame. She is a witty, spry, vivacious, amusing, and interesting woman. In Geneva we saw a photograph of her in a Paris illustrated weekly. Just before the war she gave a big garden party at her Paris house; when all the guests were assembled, she rode into the party on an elephant's back. She was almost eighty then. She says she is now eighty-two.

"A few weeks ago an acquaintance of ours saw her perform at a party, among other bits of tumbling, an athletic feat: to show her vim and vigor, she turned a somersault, and then stood on her head for two full minutes. I have heard that some malicious Hollywood gossips are whispering that she is only sixty-two, but has taken on another twenty years in order to be a miracle woman."

§ "In the driveway of Montauk Manor we met a slender lady. Her name was Julia Hoyt. M. knew her eighteen years ago on the Lido in Venice. At that time she was a celebrated New York beauty and dictator of fashion. She still looks it. The two of them recalled those jolly, care-free days. Morris Gest, the producer, Belasco's son-in-law, introduced the two. M. and Gest often exchange memories of the time when a gay, unconcerned company of international friends used to spend every summer at Venice and the Lido: Max Reinhardt with his two sons, then children, but now both Hollywood producers; Joseph Urban, the New York architect (who designed

d Theater on Sixth Avenue and many Ameri-
es), and his wife; Gilbert Miller and his family;
Bodanzkys (he, the conductor of the Metro-
era); Fred and Elsa Muschenheim, the owners
el Astor in New York; Anton Geiringer, the
the Volkstheater in Vienna; Mary Lewis, who
the chorus of a Greenwich Village night-club
rst singer of the Metropolitan; Alma Mahler,
of the composer Gustav Mahler; Noël Cow-
on and so forth.

embers fondly a nice Mr. Edwards, who was
managers of the Metropolitan Opera, and who
them to a new mixed drink in the Giacomuzzi
ice. I learned to mix the drink in that same bar,
years later, in 1935. To make this drink, the
liarity was that you would not take a cocktail
a tumbler. The concoction itself was: one-
tumbler of gin, two thirds of a tumbler of
Punt e Mes" Vermouth, three drops of bitters
ura, but the secret recipe of a three-hundred-
enice pharmacy.

tion was at the bottom of it when Morris Gest,
gondola with M. and a party on the Grand
enice that summer eighteen years ago, intro-
o an elderly gentleman in a gondola that was
ng beside their own. Gest shouted cryptically
alm Venetian night: 'Mr. Molnar, meet the
merican!' Everybody waved his hat, and
cular, even irreverent greetings to the elderly
in the other gondola. M. had no idea who this

unassuming gentleman was. He thought Gest must be joking, and the man was some Broadway pal of Gest's.

"Later he found out that the gentleman was Charles Evans Hughes, the world-famous American diplomat, Secretary of State, and candidate for president (he afterward became Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court). Even now, eighteen years after, M. still often upbraids Gest for that scene. Mr. Gest always excuses himself on the ground of the Edwards mixture."

¶ "Morris Gest knocks on the door of M's room, Room 835 in the Hotel Plaza, almost every Sunday between four and five. Sometimes Mr. Florman, the inventor, comes with him. Mr. Gest always brings some present for M. and for me. They are usually ingenious gadgets invented by Mr. Florman. Recently he brought a cigarette-case made of metal but enameled in white; it represents an envelope bearing M's name and address in longhand. There is even a red two-cent stamp under the transparent enamel. M. gave the case to me, saying it ought to remind me to smoke less. I always carry it. Mr. Gest says I needn't be afraid of losing it, because the mail will bring it back, as it bears not only the correct address, but even a stamp. He thinks this is the best part of the whole idea."

¶ "Two interesting new acquaintances. We had lunch with them at the Park Chambers Restaurant. Miss Maria Leiper, the learned lady editor at the publishing house

of Simon and Schuster, and Mr. Quincy Howe, the author and radio commentator, whom we have been listening to for a long time over WQXR every evening at nine. Miss Leiper is the best-looking scholar I have ever seen. I am grateful to her for sending me a Hungarian book for an editorial opinion.

"Mr. Howe is very well-informed on the European situation.—The person who is considered here to have the best grasp of European affairs is former Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles, whom Roosevelt sent abroad in 1940 to consult with all the European chiefs of state. Sumner Welles even negotiated with Hitler on behalf of world peace. All I can say about Mr. Welles, who has been pointed out to me in the elevator in the Plaza, is that he is a dapper, good-looking man who makes a dignified impression."

§ "New Year's Eve at Billy Rose's house. Until early morning. The hostess and I sat on the floor. On the enormous couch sat, beside M., Ray Goetz, Billy Rose, Edward Robinson, Judith Anderson, and Ruth Gordon. Marc Chagall was hanging on the wall. On the table reposed a huge smoked turkey, the first smoked bird I ever saw in my life."

§ "I have seen the revival of M's *Liliom* with Ingrid Bergman and Burgess Meredith in the leading parts. M. was at home, sick in bed. Mr. Meredith and the producer,

Vinton Freedley, went to see him. Miss Bergman came to America on January 12, 1940, aboard the liner *Rex*, the same vessel that M. was on. They did not know each other at the time. When their vessel finally came alongside the pier in the dark winter night, the cheers from ashore could be heard on shipboard, followed by a singing chorus. M. was surprised: he supposed that either the Hungarian colony or his friend Gilbert Miller, who had produced a lot of his plays in New York, had arranged it. Now M. says it is possible that Miss Bergman also thought the ovation was for her, because she was a famous Swedish actress, and a Hollywood picture of hers, *Intermezzo*, (with Leslie Howard) was running successfully in New York. Even before they went ashore, M. discovered that the jubilant ovation and the chorus of hundreds of voices were a Zionist welcome intended for Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the leading champion of the Jewish homeland in Palestine, who arrived aboard the same ship, unknown to either M. or Miss Bergman. Despite his esteem for Dr. Weizmann, M. said it was quite an anti-climax to walk down the gangplank to the sounds of the chorus. The voyage was not at all bad, M. said, aside from the uneasy feeling caused by the whispering about a British destroyer that accompanied the vessel at a respectful distance in case of German submarines, to guard one passenger, a certain Mr. Butler, one of the highest officials of the British Embassy in Washington."

§ "When we read that the Italian liner *Rex*, on which M. - and later I - came over, had been sunk in the war, M.

said, 'Poor Rex has had a bad end but she brought luck to some of my fellow passengers. The slow-rising and very different careers of passengers Michael Todd, Ingrid Bergman, and Chaim Weizmann skyrocketed soon after landing.' "

¶ "I've been several times to rehearsals of *Carousel*, the musical version of M's *Liliom*. Although M. forbade me to, I went secretly to New Haven for the try out opening. I had no ticket to the show, but Oscar Hammerstein sneaked me in to the standing room just after the curtain rose, when the lights went down. I caught sight of M. sitting with his friend, Dr. Albert Sirmay, way down in front. The performance went on until after midnight. I went straight to the station and back to New York, delighted and moved. The skill with which the spirit and even the dialogue of *Liliom* had been preserved in *Carousel* is amazing. I fully agreed with M., who kept raving to me in a whisper all through the rehearsals about the directorial ability of Rouben Mamoulian, who stood motionless on the stage, instructing actors, chorus, and ballet with perfect calm, speaking softly, and displaying ingenuity in everything he said. Mamoulian's direction of *Porgy* in New York seventeen years ago was a revelation to M. and Reinhardt; they often spoke of it. As for M., he sticks to his belief that no director within his experience on Broadway has yet surpassed Mamoulian. Richard Rodgers' music really went to my heart. Theatrical music has never moved me so deeply before. My favorite song was always Gershwin's *Summertime*. M.

and I both love the *Londonderry Air* in Fritz Kreisler's recording; M's favorite tune was the *Pavane pour une infante defunte* of Ravel, his favorite composer. Our favorite music now, instead of those three tunes, is *Carousel*, from beginning to end."

§ "During the rehearsals of *Carousel* Lili and M. went out with the composer of the music for the show, Richard Rodgers, to lunch at Sardi's. Rodgers told them a great many interesting things about his theatrical career, his memories agreeable and disagreeable. M. says Rodgers is one of the foremost experts he has ever met in the American show business."

(I have something to add to this note. Among the many instructive things Richard Rodgers told us, one seems to me the best of all. Indeed I consider it a word of true wisdom about play writing, although Rodgers is not a playwright at all, but a composer. To sum up in my own words the essence of what Rodgers said: the one Big Mistake in playwriting, the irreparable blunder, can be made only at the very first moment and in a fraction of a second. This is the moment when you decide to write a certain play. You commit the irreparable blunder if, 1. the basic idea is not good, or 2. you yourself are not good enough to write a play on the given good basic idea. All other mistakes that are made in writing or producing a play can be repaired. For instance, is the ending of the second act wrong? Write a new ending, and another and another, over and over until you get the right one. Is the third act weak? Write another and another, alone or with a col-

laborator, until finally you have a good one. Is an actor poor in his part? Swap him around. Does the director misunderstand the play? Hire a new one. Is a set sour? Paint it over. All this is a mere question of time, money, self-criticism, and a few—preferably very few—good advisers. *Any* bad feature can be remedied—any at all. Only the one mistake of the very first moment, the Big One, is irreparable: when you give a yes or no to the question, “Shall I write this play?”)

¶ “M. smiles wryly about such ‘facts’ as we have recently seen in print, not for the first time: we learned that M. had made a million dollars from the stage and screen rights to *Liliom*. We have in our files a copy of the contract, drawn soon after the New York opening (April 20, 1921) and the ensuing favorable notices of *Liliom*, selling film rights in the play for \$750, less commission to the Budapest agent.”

¶ “Louella O. Parsons mentioned in one of her *Journal-American* columns that she had met M. long, long ago in Budapest. M. remembers that the manager of a Budapest theater brought Louella Parsons one morning into the darkened auditorium at a rehearsal where M. was doing one of his plays. The American newspaper woman arrived the very moment after a frightful outburst between actors, a full-scale row. Naturally, all was sweet as honey

in front of the visitor. The moment she left, it started again.

"Lawrence Langner, one of the chief figures in the Theatre Guild, also went to see M. many, many years ago in Budapest. Of course, Mr. Langner was interested mainly in Hungarian acting, which he had never seen any of, but he could spend very little time in Budapest. So that Mr. Langner could say he had seen all the acting in Budapest, M. rushed him around on his one free evening in a car at fire-engine speed, taking him to six plays at six theaters, and spending fifteen or twenty minutes at each.

"Speaking of American guests, M. mentioned the actress Bertha Kalich, then well known in New York, who called on him with her husband in Budapest. Coming back to New York, this kind hearted lady reported in newspaper interviews that M. lived in a small apartment, to be found with difficulty along the dark corridors of a large, neglected tenement in an almost unknown suburban side street. (Which, according to M., was approximately true, but considering his haphazard life at the time, in its origin rather romantic, shall we say, than financial.) Broadway producers, who had always paid M's royalties promptly, complained bitterly to M's New York agent. The agent thereupon sent M. a long night letter. It was some time, M. says, before this little tempest of pity subsided."

¶ "M. wrote a bitter article in his friend Ferenc Gondör's New York Hungarian weekly, *Az Ember*. M. was a news-

paperman for twenty-three years. He gave up every-day professional journalism, which he had undertaken in 1896 as a court reporter, in 1919. During that time he wrote daily satirical dialogues on topical subjects, non-political editorials, and also served for many years as a columnist. Later, he was under contract to write non-fiction articles for two foreign papers, the *Berliner Tageblatt* and Hearst's *New York American*. He wound up his newspaper work with two years as a war correspondent. His war reports from Russia appeared first in the Budapest *Az Est* and the Vienna *Neue Freie Presse*, afterward in the London *Morning Post* and in a New York paper. They were later published in book form in Hungarian and German.

"His present article in *Az Ember* deals with 'Emigration, a disease.' M. says this was the second occasion that lured him back momentarily into his original trade of newspaper work, which even now he still likes better than play-writing. The first occasion, as he wistfully recalls, was a testimonial dinner in Berlin, when he sat next to Luigi Pirandello, the Italian dramatist, then already famous, who had come to Berlin to see his play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, which Reinhardt gave a most original production and helped turn into a smash hit. M. improved this opportunity to interview Pirandello (whom he continued to correspond with from that time forward) for *Az Est*. Pirandello was by no means a young man when his plays became fashionable. He was a teacher. He talked at length of his teaching in Rome. He taught at a special school, where his pupils were young teachers. According to M. you could easily tell—not from

his plays, but from his private conversation and manner—that he had been a teacher too long, or at least longer than he ought.”

¶ “A few days ago (summer of 1946) at Lake Luzerne, New York, we saw by the *New York Times* that M’s one-act play (one of the late Max Pallenberg’s favorite parts), the satirical comedy, *One, Two, Three*, had been banned by decree from the repertoire of every theater in Russia. We never had the slightest idea the play had ever been performed in Russia. At the same time—good company! Somerset Maugham’s *The Circle*, another repertory favorite in Russia, was also forbidden. It was about then, too, that we heard M’s fiftieth anniversary as a writer had been commemorated in Palestine over the radio and in the theaters, with performances of his plays translated by Dr. Emil Feuerstein from Hungarian into Hebrew.”

¶ “Talking of his father, M. said the lines about him in the prologue to the book *The Captain Of St. Margaret’s* were not fiction, but fact.”

(The prologue tells how my father was once family physician to Gustave Eiffel, the builder of the Eiffel Tower at Paris, when the great expert in iron construction was at Budapest putting up two of his great creations—the Western Railroad Station and the Margaret Bridge, which spans the Danube at the southern tip of St. Mar-

garet's Island. The bridge is a harmonious iron work of art, bearing Eiffel's personality so strongly upon it that the attentive passer-by seems to see the Eiffel Tower laid down across the broad river. I remarked to Wanda, and she often repeated to others, that one proof of my late father's capability as a doctor was the fact that Eiffel lived to be ninety-one.)

¶ (The following, also about my father, I believe I have never told anyone except Wanda. I remember when I told her. In San Remo my Italian translators of many years' standing, Mario de Vellis and his wife Olga Aillaud, came to see me. They were telling me about the good reviews of some of my more recent plays in Italy. When they left, Wanda gently rebuked me for hearing the news with too great a degree of modesty, indeed displaying too much skepticism toward myself, and she said I might have withheld certain self critical remarks from my chosen Italian representatives. That was when I told her about Lacika.

On the desk in my father's doctor's office was a picture of a small boy, in a metal frame. It was a photograph of my elder brother, who died before I was born; he lived two years. His name was Lacika.

This, parenthetically, is a diminutive of the Hungarian name László, which is rendered in English by the German form Ladislas or Ladislaus. Originally it was a Slavic name, Vladislav. The name is popular in Hungary because it was borne by one of the greatest Hungarian kings, St. László I.

My parents loved Lacika deeply, and every time they spoke of him always sadly and lovingly--I had a vague feeling, even during my childhood, that I was an intruder, usurping Lacika's position of first-born son in the family. Whenever I was left alone in the office I would gaze long and often at Lacika's picture. He was a handsome, gentle, golden-blond child with a sad expression: the very opposite of me, black haired, lively, and jolly as I was. Later, though still in my childhood, I began to have a pronounced feeling or did I only imagine it? that every time my parents looked at me they were thinking sadly of Lacika, whom, I felt, they loved much more than me.

This could have been true only in so far as a dead child lives for a long time deeper in the hearts of its parents than a living child can.

As a young man in an Austrian sanitarium, after reading all the books of Dr. Sigmund Freud that had then appeared, I thought I should persuade myself that many of my inhibitions had sprung from this intruder complex of mine. I was thinking chiefly of my shyness, my exaggerated and sometimes not altogether sincere modesty, the feeling I have so often had that the gifts of life rightfully belonged not to me but to others, the feeling I had usurped them from other people, whom God had withheld them from. Not until a few years ago did I give up torturing myself with such matters, when Hitler took away from me all the gifts of life.

Even at seventeen, when I finished high school and brought home a good "Certificate of Maturity," which would open the doors of every university in Europe, I thought I saw on my father's pleased face a fleeting

shadow of the thought, "Why not Lacika?" And once again I thought I saw this shadow whisk across my father's face, after the opening of my first play, *The Lawyer*, at Budapest in 1902, when I showed him the good notices the morning after.)

§ "The works of real writers, M. tells me, contain great many hidden, adroitly distorted, more or less camouflaged, yet often because the author feels safe behind his camouflage frighteningly honest fragments of autobiography. The better disguised these confessions are the more honest they will be. M. says if he were a modern psychoanalyst, and had to analyze a professional writer (which God forbid), instead of questioning the man, he would have him take a pencil and underline the passages in all his works, howsoever disguised, that were written about himself."

(When I told Wanda this, I was thinking chiefly of my Hungarian novel, *The Green Hussar*. I even showed her the passage in Chapter XIX that I would have thought of if I had been a patient instructed by the doctor to underline the bits describing details of my life story. This chapter tells of a girl who is beaten within an inch of her life by the jealous man she lives with, on account of a boy. I would have underscored the following story this boy told about himself in my novel.

"One evening I was drinking glass upon glass of brandy at the Orpheum Winter Garden. . . . I had neatly planned: brandy by day, sleeping powders

night. Anything to make sure my mind was never awake for a moment. That would have been unbearable. A large gypsy band was playing terribly loud at the Winter Garden, and this too quite stunned my alcohol-soaked brain. I was toiling from each day to the next, doping my way through, with just one blurred yet recurrent idea: I'm putting something off. After eleven Erna F. came in . . . for supper at the Winter Garden . . . 'Tell me,' she whispered discreetly, 'would you be interested to hear something that that rotten photographer told about Annie—and you?' . . . She was talking . . . 'The photographer said . . . he whacked away at the poor thing with the iron rod, the vile creature, and he said he would have stopped, only Annie began crying and roaring like fury, and shouted your name in his face. That was what made the photographer wild, because we all knew that Annie was simply silly about you. So then the man hit her all the harder, because that hurt him . . . and Annie knew it very well and kept shouting your name still louder, and that made the man even wilder, and he admits he had a regular fit to smash the girl, so that she'd stop, and he wound her hair around his hand and flung Annie against the furniture . . . and dragged her around the floor and kicked her . . . but she would not hold her tongue; she just kept crying and screaming your name, and kept saying, "I'm yours, my darling, I'm thinking of you, my darling, why aren't you here, my darling?"' . . .

"Near my apartment a wretched café was still partly lit up. . . . Here I drank enough more so that my legs were no longer quite ready to carry me. Instinct alone

checked me at this limit. Even so I got home with great difficulty; I dimly remember having fallen down on the street. At home I made tea. In the hot tea, as usual, I took a sleeping-powder. There were still nine veronal powders in the box. 'I'm yours, I'm thinking of you, why aren't you here, my darling?' Imagine destroying that beautiful, loving little body so. . . . She had been taken by the hair and banged against the furniture and dragged around the floor and kicked. 'I'm yours, my darling. Why aren't you here?' I poured the other nine powders into one cup of tea. That is why you have to be drunk in such a state: I tossed off the cup as if it were another glass of brandy. That night I learned what death means. The fact that they brought me back to life later does not alter the case."

The book in which I underlined that passage appeared in 1937. The incident faithfully recounted in this narrative took place twenty-seven years before, in 1910. Wanda was two years old then.)

§ (To dwell a few minutes more on the subject of how an author's brain transforms a real occurrence into fiction, let me tell here an extremely disagreeable incident from the life of a friend. In his biography it would scarcely fill more than two or three pages, if indeed it went beyond three lines. I wrote a play out of it.

The friend's name is Zoltán Thonika. He is a Hungarian nobleman, a professional soldier from earliest youth. When I last saw him he was a cavalry officer, the

colonel of a hussar regiment, holding several prizes as a daring gentleman rider. Our friendship dates back to the time when he was a first lieutenant. Later, as a captain, he fought the Russians in World War I. In 1915 he spent some weeks' leave in Budapest. One night he told me a reminiscence of his days as a young lieutenant.

He had belonged to a garrison regiment in a small Hungarian city. Here he made the acquaintance of a pretty, married woman who immediately caught his fancy. He became a daily visitor at the house of the woman and her husband, the owner of a small factory, who worshipped his wife. After dinner the lieutenant was in the habit of dropping in for a cup of tea with the couple, who lived in a villa out of town. They would sip tea, the wife would play the piano rather wistfully, and the husband incessantly retailed his hunting adventures. He was one of the best-known and most passionate huntsmen in that part of the country.

The lieutenant and the wife fell madly in love. The doting and jealous husband discovered this even before the other two became aware of it themselves, and resorted to various sly dodges to prevent the daily encounters. He struggled desperately by every means to estrange his wife from the lieutenant. But it was no use. He began to see the day swiftly approaching when his wife would confess her new passion and leave him in order to marry the lieutenant.

Before there was time for this, the following occurred. One evening the lieutenant appeared as usual at the factory owner's house. He found the couple in the drawing room, where they generally took tea. The wife was play-

ing the piano. On the table in front of the husband were his fine English and Belgian hunting rifles, laid out in order. He was polishing, oiling, and inspecting them, peering with expert eye down the barrels, and testing the triggers.

The lieutenant sat down in his usual armchair. There were a few cursory remarks about the winter weather. The woman got up from the piano, poured tea for the lieutenant, and sat down to the piano again. She leafed through her music, started to play, but nervously broke off each piece after the first few measures, only to go on leafing and then start another piece. The husband said little. Apparently he was very much absorbed in his rifles. The atmosphere was charged and tense, as always of late, none the less so for the display of lethal weapons.

During a break in the conversation, which had been faltering enough anyway, one of the rifles went off. The bullet struck the lieutenant in the left arm.

As he told me in 1915, he never had a moment's doubt that the husband meant to kill him, sheltering behind the cowardly excuse of rifle cleaning, and thus giving his attempted murder the color of an accident. In the moment of utter horror following the shot, the husband, with masterly dissimulation, desperately begged pardon, the wife fainted, and the lieutenant *laughingly denied that the bullet had touched him*. Both men strove to bring the wife around, which they shortly accomplished. The husband took the rifles out of the room.

Then all three sat down around the table and had tea. The lieutenant, as he told me, was in great pain, but concealed it with supreme will-power. They remained to-

gether for some time, until the lieutenant discovered the blood was beginning to soak the sleeve of his uniform, and threatening to drip. Thereupon he said a calm goodbye, as if nothing had happened, left, and went straight to the hospital, where they dressed his wound. Fortunately the bullet had not touched the bone. When some years later, a captain by then, he told me of the occurrence, he rolled up his sleeve and showed me the wound.

He never saw the woman again after that evening. He never went back to her house, nor did he try to meet her elsewhere. His reason was that the woman herself must have known perfectly well that the shot was no unlucky accident, but a cowardly attempt at murder; nevertheless she reacted on the spot as if she had never doubted its being a mishap. In other words, at that fateful moment, for fear of her husband and the unpleasant consequences that might result, she had coldly abandoned him to side with the apparently stronger would-be murderer.

In 1919 I made a one-act play out of this occurrence, almost unchanged, under the title *Marshal*. It was performed in Budapest and Vienna during the 1922-23 season. It became one of the vehicles of Italy's celebrated Memo Benassi. The English version may be found in the volume called *All the Plays of Molnar*, published in New York by the Vanguard Press in 1929. (By the way, the title of the book is now, in 1948, no longer appropriate, for since then I have written twenty more plays, several of which have been produced on Broadway or filmed in Hollywood.)

The only change worth mention that I made in dramatizing the true story was to turn the hussar lieutenant into

an actor. In the true story, I thought the most dramatic moment was when the lieutenant was concealing his wound and carrying on the conversation, partly out of pride, so as not to give the husband even the small satisfaction of having wounded him, and partly in order to observe the behavior, or rather the reaction, of the woman who loved him in this situation. In the second half of the nineteenth century, in the great days of the Paris salon drama under Dumas fils, Sardou, Augier, and Hervieu, these scenes were called *la scène à faire*. I felt that if the husband's victim were an actor, his capacity to conceal both bodily and spiritual pain—to play the part of a man not wounded and not suffering—would be much more credible and therefore much more moving.)

§ “A faithful New York friend, Mrs. Dorothy Gernsback, who had been to see M. and me ten years ago in Budapest, and was very helpful to us when we came to New York in 1940, invited me to dinner, where I had the pleasure of meeting her two nice daughters. We were talking about M’s plays. Dorothy asked jokingly why M. didn’t make me a character in one of them. I told her she was not the first to ask. When the question was first put to M., he replied that two years before I was born he had described me so perfectly, as the feminine lead, Julie, in *Liliom*, that with the best will in the world he could not change a word of it even today. My remark at the time really tended to contradict this idea, one of his favorites, that he had described me before I was in the world. I said I had always been so fond of the touching and at-

tractive figure of Julie that in the course of years I must unintentionally and subconsciously have tried to be as much like Julie as I could."

¶ "As a young man in 1909 M. spent six weeks with an attack of arthritis in a Budapest hospital, where the nurses were nuns. He told me that one of the nuns who were nursing him had two gold teeth, then considered the height of style. 'It was tactless of me,' said M., 'but I couldn't resist asking her how it happened that she, a nun, had expensive gold teeth.' The nun replied, casting down her eyes, 'Before I became a happy nun, I was an unhappy society girl.'"

(Incidentally, lying in that hospital bed with all my joints, including my ten fingers, bandaged and thickly covered with black ichthyol salve, I contrived to write in longhand a comedy entitled *The Guardsman*, which was a success in Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, and Paris, flopped miserably in New York, but was revived there fifteen years later, in 1924, by that great American acting couple Lunt and Fontanne. They also made a movie of it that was long popular.

The question about the gold teeth and the nun's reply occur unchanged in one of my plays, a tragedy called *Sacred and Profane Love*. This was the first of my plays in which my wife Lili appeared in Budapest. An English version was made by the poetess Edna St. Vincent Millay, and produced in New York in 1923 by Arthur Hopkins under the title *Launzi*.)

¶ (Somewhere among Wanda's papers there must be a leaf torn from one of my Hungarian books published many years ago—a leaf that I gave her once when she was unhappy about a piece of slander. On the two sides of the leaf are a collection of lines read and noted down by me in the course of years.

I had often been plagued by slander, like most of the people who, instead of living as hermits in some God-forsaken cave, spend their lives around theatres. I was cured of the disease of feeling sick over lies and libelous stories about myself by wise sayings and shrewd, honest confessions drawn mainly from the autobiographical writings of the oft attacked master of French drama, Alexandre Dumas fils, and also from writings by the man whom Dumas called the "most insulted and slandered man," the great religion-psychologist Ernest Renan, author of the world famous *Life of Jesus*. Or at least I thought I was cured.

Renan, for instance, felt one should never answer newspaper attacks, no matter how monstrous. Among other things he did not protest when a great Paris newspaper accused him of accepting a million francs from the Rothschilds to write the *Life of Jesus*. "I shall not protest," he wrote in his autobiographical *Feuilles détachées*, "even if they print a facsimile of a receipt for the million with my signature."

Dumas wrote in an afterword to his play, *La Princesse de Bagdad*, which was played at the time when he was being most sharply attacked and blackened, "The only sensible reply to slander is silence, which embraces all the

forms and effects of contempt; I have never found that slander had any lasting effect on people's final judgment. I have even found that a hundred howling and unjust enemies always somehow produce a new, unknown friend who is indignant at the injustices. These unknown friends in time go to make up what is called public opinion."

I swallowed, and indeed digested, all these gems of wisdom, and they have been a help to me through life. Later, now and then a really outstanding specimen of slander would still upset me. At such moments of disgust Wanda used to remind me of my collection of wise sayings, which had already several times cured me of the passing spiritual malaise induced by slander. She reminded me of what I had once told her when she was unhappy about a painful libel directed at her personally.

I told her she should take example by me, cured as I was of the disease of taking any notice whatever of calumny. "You ought to learn from me," I preached at her. To teach her the value of a cured invalid, I pointed out to her in Las Cases' *Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène* a saying of Napoléon's, who advised his friends to ask only those people for medicine who had recovered from the disease in question. He was delighted to learn about the method of the Babylonians, who put their patients on the streets in front of the door, bed and all, and asked passers-by whether they had had any similar disease, and if so, what medicine had cured them. "In this way," said Napoléon, "at least one avoided the advice of the people who had been killed by a medicine."

¶ "I like to tell something I heard of M. as a young playwright aged twenty-five or twenty-six, when he was having a secret correspondence with an actress who returned his passion. A thing like this story could never happen anywhere except in the theater.

"Along with several private detectives, three people kept guard over the girl lest she communicate in any way with M.: her father and mother, whom she lived with, and her well-to-do so-called 'fiancé', to whom her parents were determined to marry her at all costs. (Years afterward the girl did marry the man, giving up her stage career.) When the parents and the 'fiancé' recognized that the attraction between the young couple was mutual and serious, the guard against M. became so vigilant that the two could practically not communicate in any way whatever. When the girl had a part, her mother would accompany her to the theater and stand guard all evening in her dressing room or in the wings; the 'fiancé' waited for her at the stage door after the performance, and at home her mail was opened and strictly censored before it reached her.

"About this time the girl got a part in a French play in one scene of which a letter was brought to her. (M. says letters were brought or written in practically every play of the time, quite as often as people on the stage nowadays use the telephone.) The footman who presented the letter was required by his part to ask for an answer. Likewise, in conformity with her part, the girl excitedly scrawled a quick reply, stuffed it into an envelope, and handed it to the footman.

"I imagine it is unnecessary to add that M. used to write the prop letter every evening and hand it to the actor playing the footman, who in turn brought the answer, scribbled in the presence of twelve hundred spectators, to the anxiously waiting M. at a café after the performance."

¶ (It is a truth essentially unimportant to the general public, and perhaps interesting only to theatrical professionals, but at just one moment of my life I had vivid and convincing proof of how ephemeral and mortal a playwright himself is, while even the mediocre figures in his works survive him. I told the story to my American colleague S. N. Behrman one evening when Wanda and he and I were dining together in one of my accustomed small New York restaurants.

I spent several months one winter at Cannes, where I was working in a hotel room on the acting version of my legend, *Miracle in the Mountains*. My wife Lili had a contract with Reinhardt's Berlin and Vienna theaters at the time. Getting a short holiday, she came to Cannes for a week to visit me.

One morning on the street I saw posters announcing the appearance, for one night only, of the then greatest Italian actor, Ermete Zacconi. According to the posters he was playing one of his best parts that evening, in the Italian drama *La Morte Civile*.

I rushed immediately to a florist, and sent to Zacconi—

today past ninety and retired from the stage, he is living on the west coast of Italy—already an old man then, a big bunch of roses, along with a letter gratefully reminding him of the time some twenty-four years before when one of his international tours had brought him to Budapest. There he had chanced to see a performance of my play, *The Devil*, and, taking a fancy to the leading part, he had the play translated that very night from Hungarian into French, since no Italian translator was available at the moment. Going back to Italy soon afterward, he himself translated the French version into Italian, produced the play at Turin in 1908, and kept it in his repertory for more than twenty years. Indeed it became one of his favorite parts.

Just before the opening, late in 1907, he invited me to Turin, where I attended the rehearsals, and conferred with him until past midnight every night about even the smallest details of the production; he was directing the play as well as acting in it. Since this was the first time any play of mine had been performed outside of my little native country, Hungary, let alone by so great an artist, those days and nights in Turin will remain unforgettable as long as I live, the more so as I was only twenty nine at the time.

Zacconi was not only the greatest Italian actor of his time, but also one of the most cultivated and widely read men I have ever met in the theater. He not only studied Plato's dialogues profoundly, but made selections and adaptations in modern Italian, and performed them in various Italian theaters. In everything regarding the Shakespearean period, Elizabethan drama, and solid schol-

arly criticism of Shakespeare's works he was an authority. He spent whole nights at Turin expounding to me his original, personal conception of Hamlet, a part he often played in a way altogether different from what was customary at the time, disdaining all declamation, and making Hamlet into a completely modern, nervous type, perhaps even carrying naturalism a trifle too far.

As aforesaid, twenty-four years later in Cannes I sent roses to Zacconi at the little Théâtre des Ambassadeurs. At midday a young man, Zacconi's secretary, came to my hotel, bringing me the maestro's thanks with a ticket for a box that evening and the maestro's urgent invitation to call on him in his dressing room during intermission. I remembered, though somewhat vaguely, his performance in Paolo Giacometti's *La Morte Civile*, since he appeared in it every evening during the weeks at the end of 1907 in Turin when we were rehearsing *The Devil* every morning and afternoon. Practically every evening I saw him in the costume for the leading part: a fiery red wig, short black jacket, black knee-breeches, coarsely knit white peasant stockings, and black low shoes with brass buckles. He was playing a South Italian peasant. (*La Morte Civile* was produced in America under two different titles: *The Civil Death* and *The Outlaw*.)

That evening in Cannes I took Lili and my visiting Viennese friends, the critic and novelist Ernst Lothar and his wife Adrienne Gessner, the actress, into my box; none of them had ever seen Zacconi. During intermission I went backstage to see the maestro, feeling not a little touched by the impending encounter after all those years.

I walked into his dressing room. There he stood, *abso-*

lutely unchanged, exactly as he had been twenty-four years before: the same fiery red wig, short black jacket, black knee-breeches, white stockings, black shoes with brass buckles. The thick layer of grease paint on his face smothered any mark of those storm-laden twenty-four years; his face was just the same healthy, red, smooth peasant face it had been in Turin, and his eyes—like those of any truly fine and great actor—had a youthful gleam from the recurring excitement of play-acting. In a word Zacconi stood before me exactly as he had a quarter of a century since, although even in Turin he had not been a young man.

I greeted him as I came into the dressing room. He shook hands, looked at me, and then tears came to his eyes. "Good God, Molnar," he said, "you with white hair?" We said nothing for a long time. I think I smiled shamefacedly, as if I had been somehow abashed. Twenty-four years before in Turin I had had a mass of long, thick coal-black curls. I looked at him, and I believe deep down in my heart I was just a little annoyed with him—simply for being so unchanged.

I gestured with a motion taking him in from head to foot. "You," I told him, "have not changed an iota from head to foot, or rather from wig to buckled shoes."

"Wigs don't turn gray," he said softly at length. "A dream figure remains unchanged. Electra, Oedipus, Hamlet, even the poor peasant standing before you never grows old. They don't grow so much as a second older than the age they were when someone dreamed of them. Living people age—dreams, never."

This visit to the maestro made a lasting impression on

me. I repeat that perhaps only stage people, playwrights and actors, not the general public, can hear the melancholy little air humming through this episode.

S. N. Behrman liked the story, and jotted it down in his notebook. It appeared in his *New Yorker* profile of me in 1946, told in his ironical but warmhearted style.)

¶ "M. often says jokingly that this is another of those things that will most certainly never happen to him. His Italian translator, Mario de Vellis, once told him that the Italian government had officially renamed the little Sicilian village of Aci, where the novelist and playwright Giovanni Verga (author of the book for Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*) was born, in his honor, so that all the geography books and maps show *Aci Verga* instead of Aci. M. says if he wanted to be cynical, with all due admiration for Verga, he would say that it proved not the greatness of Verga but the smallness of Aci. For even Verga would not have had such an honor if he had been born, for instance, in Rome."

¶ (There were years when I had to write two short humorous pieces every day for a Hungarian daily. Later, living abroad, I wrote two a month for the *Berliner Tageblatt*. Only a few of these— I wrote several hundred—were ever collected in book form. But for thirty years I had been saving all the others, all the many clippings, in a big envelope. After Wanda's death I was arranging my things one day, and gave all the literary papers that I thought

superfluous to a bellboy at the hotel, to be burned in the incinerator. This survey of old memories made me nervous, naturally enough. In my agitation I accidentally tossed the fat envelope filled with several hundred of my Hungarian, German, English, and French short stories and other anecdotal pieces on the pile of paper destined for the flames. And in fact they ended up in the incinerator. They were little, never to be recovered mementoes of my good humor in thirty long gone years.

Wanda knew them almost all. She had two favorites among these trifles. They first appeared in German, in the *Berliner Tageblatt*. I copy them here from one of my Hungarian books, which bears the title of *Toll*. (To exactly like the German word *Feder*, means both "pen" and "feather.") The title of the first piece was "Dramaturgy." It runs as follows:

"If I were ever to write a great work on dramaturgy I would use as my starting point the idea that spending the evening at a theater is a punishment. Let us transport ourselves back to the times when the Inquisition not only tormented its victims with hot irons and the rack, but also invented such ingenious tortures as letting drops of water drip into the mouth of the victim, stretched out on his back. Let us put out of our minds everything we are accustomed to in connection with the concept 'theater,' and let us imagine that an inquisitor who prided himself on inventing new torments devised the following punishment:

"The sinner is required once a week, at a set hour,

a set moment, suddenly to drop all his business, and, in good weather or bad, to hasten to a large hall. This hall will be darkened at once, and the sinner conducted to a narrow seat. Here he will sit in the dark for three hours, rigid and motionless. During this time the following will be forbidden: 1. Leaving the room. 2. Getting up. 3. Shifting uneasily to and fro. 4. Turning around. 5. Talking. 6. Blowing his nose. 7. Coughing. 8. Sneezing. 9. Eating. 10. Drinking. 11. Smoking. 12. Laughing of his own accord. 13. Sleeping. 14. Reading. 15. Writing. 16. Stretching. 17. Yawning. 18. Looking anywhere except forward. 19. Moving to another seat. 20. Not waiting for the end. 21. The culprit must endure heat. 22. Must endure cold. 23. Must swallow all exasperation in silence. 24. Is forbidden to give any sign of indignation. 25. To sigh or groan aloud. 26. To make any changes in his clothing. 27. Not to pay attention. 28. To let his brain rest or shut it off. 29. To interrupt any applause that does violence to his own convictions. 30. To appear in ordinary comfortable day dress. 31. To cease all these torments at pleasure and resume them another time. Further, a number of other things are forbidden that I cannot remember at the moment.

"This human being banned to darkness and prevented from exercising any function is called a theatergoer: thanks to the humanitarian movement of modern times he enjoys the relief—but not always—of being allowed out for a few minutes every hour to rest from his physical torment and recruit his strength for fresh torments.

"What, then, is dramaturgy? Dramaturgy is that charitable science which has gathered all the rules for ameli-

orating the situation of this condemned victim of bodily torment by tearing down one wall of the hall and showing him something in the gap. And this something must be so attractive that the above-described bodily torment becomes first bearable to the victim, then imperceptible, and finally desirable. So desirable that the victim is even ready to spend his hard-earned money for it, and indeed to scramble for the privilege of sitting inside.

"This would be the introduction to my dramaturgy. After it would follow the chapters telling the low and exalted, superficial and profound, vulgar and noble methods that exist for transmitting this anesthetic effectively through the gap in the wall to those who are suffering martyrdom."

The title of the other sketch, which has no connection with the first beyond being Wanda's other favorite, was "Coffee." Here it is:

"A frightful dream: I invented ordinary breakfast coffee, coffee with milk. I was the only person in the whole world who breakfasted on that beverage. I was convinced that if mankind should come to know my discovery, it would become the world's most popular breakfast drink, and hundreds of millions of people would drink it, even several times a day. So I rushed to a great bank that financed various industrial enterprises, and after many difficulties was admitted to see the top boss. When I told him I had discovered a drink for which I prophesied universal popularity, the bank president asked me to

explain my discovery. I had to be brief, so I confined myself to saying:

“You hire some people, and ship them to the other side of the globe, where there is a certain kind of bush in each of whose berries are two bean-like seeds. When the berries are ripe, your people gather the beans, put them into an iron vessel, and light a fire under the vessel; they heat the vessel slowly, but not hot enough to burn the beans, only to a degree that will turn them black and make them spread a pungent burning stench.’

“The president was already eyeing me suspiciously.

“‘Then,’ I went on, ‘you grind these half-scorched seeds to powder. But we don’t eat the powder, nor a decoction of it, but we construct a vessel in two parts, the lower of which contains boiling water. The steam from this water rises through the black, granular powder, which rests on a sort of sieve above the water; this causes the powder to exude a blackish liquid, which is collected in a separate vessel, and the bitter-sour taste of which is unpalatable to most people.’

“By now, the president is looking at me with very wide-open eyes.

“‘Then,’ I went on, ‘we set out to find a certain mammal; for our purposes we require the female. From this female we remove, in an unnatural and artificial manner, by means of a sort of torture, the white liquid with which it ordinarily feeds its newborn young. This liquid we put on the fire, warm it to the boiling point, then cool it off, but not entirely—only to the point where it will not burn the human mouth. The liquid obtained from the animal

and thus prepared is mixed with the black liquid from the plants.'

" 'Ugh,' said the president.

" 'Then,' I went implacably on, 'in order to make this mixture palatable, we go out into a field and plant a certain plant called a beet, which has a very fat root. For our purposes, however, we take not the leaves, flowers or fruit, but strangely enough the root. When the root has grown good and fat, we pull it out of the ground, slice it up and soak it in big kettles of water until this water has turned them into a sickly sweet pulp. Then we throw away the root. The dirty juice thus obtained is then distilled until all the water is driven off, and the evaporating moisture leaves only dirt-colored crystals. These crystals we crush, by a special process we bleach them snow white, and make a solid mass out of them. The solid we cut into little cubes, of which we drop two or three into the previously mentioned vegetable-animal liquid mixture, wait until they dissolve, and then we drink the whole business.'

" 'Dreadful,' said the president. He rang. His secretary entered. 'Call up the lunatic asylum at once,' he said, pointing to me.

" 'I know,' I said, as they were putting me into the strait-jacket, 'that an inventor must suffer and struggle much in discovering the world's most popular drink and getting it known and accepted, and trying to convince bank presidents that this preposterous decoction will one day be popular, nay perfectly commonplace.' ")

§ (Out of all my dispatches from World War I, part of which were published in two large volumes, Wanda's favorite was the true story of the wounded soldier with the nursing baby. To cut it quite short, a wounded Hungarian private found a nursing baby abandoned after an attack on the evacuated Serbian village of Sabac. He carried it with him. The soldier was taken with a shipment of wounded in a railroad train that went at a snail's pace to Budapest. The trip lasted for days. At that time there were still hundreds of peasants waiting for the trains of wounded at each little station, to give the soldiers food, drink, and cigarettes. At each station, the wounded private held the baby out of the window, and asked the peasant women to nurse it. There was some woman at every single station who gave the child the breast.)

§ "According to M., the bitterest saying of a refugee, compressing into witty form the spiritual tragedy of the German-Jewish intellectuals, is the remark of the novelist Lion Feuchtwanger. At a banquet given in Feuchtwanger's honor by the Overseas Press Club when he arrived in New York after his escape, he said in his speech of thanks that Hitler had robbed him of his all; only one thing Hitler could not take away—his German accent."

§ "Laci Vadnay brought Louis Bromfield to our table at the Park Chambers for lunch. Vadnay is an old friend of ours. Meeting Bromfield was an event to both of us. When

we were both putting our backs into learning English, we almost devoured his two novels, *The Rains Came* and *Night in Bombay*. I don't think it's exaggerating to say that M. and I learned the elements of American literary English out of those two books."

§ "After dinner I was the guest of Marlene Dietrich and her husband Rudy Sieber at the Hotel Croydon. Unexpectedly Marlene sent down to the storage room for one of her innumerable trunks. She gave away the entire contents of the trunk to us guests. It was full of beautiful French things. I got a Paris hat of Marlene's, and a whole set of green Paris costume jewelry. They gave a big leather briefcase to me to take to M., who was not there. I cannot imagine how so masculine an object should have come among all the feminine things in Marlene's trunk."

§ "Company at Leonard Lyons'. His wife Sylvia is a witty and sweet person. They have three healthy young sons. There were a lot of other guests: the John Steinbecks, the Oscar Levants, Orson Welles, Gabriel Pascal; later came Jimmy Cannon, the sports writer, Louis Calhern, the excellent actor, Bill Mauldin, the G.I. cartoonist, Artie Shaw and his wife Kathleen Winsor (who wrote *Forever Amber*), Erich Maria Remarque, and so forth. We saw a television receiver. It was Joe Louis, the world heavyweight champion, fighting. But before this, during dinner, Leonard Lyons projected on the wall a 16mm.

colored movie of himself and Pascal visiting Bernard Shaw in his garden at Ayot St. Lawrence. Shaw must have been in very good humor, because he practically played comedy scenes with Lyons and Pascal.—Then Lyons showed, first, Hitler's signature on a military document, next the receiver of Hitler's private telephone, which Lyons himself had brought back as a souvenir from the ruins of Hitler's bedroom in Berchtesgaden. Many words of historic importance and even more horrible words must have passed through that instrument. Someone said I ought to speak into it. The idea almost made me ill. Lyons has a whole collection of similar personal mementoes of Hitler."

§ "A letter has come from M's Budapest lawyer. Everything M. left behind in Budapest is gone—his beautiful old furniture, pieces of Venetian glass gathered lovingly for years, his collection of old Austrian carved and painted wooden figures of saints, and his valuable library of four thousand volumes. It was all lost, partly to bombs, but mostly to thieves, like the property of so many Budapest families, collected and cherished through a lifetime. M. tells me he feels that when a world is being looted and the beloved household goods of millions vanish without a trace, you do not suffer the same sense of loss as when, for instance, burglars ransack your house in peacetime. M. holds to the theory that every affliction grows less, the more people share it with us.

"Actually he grieves for only one piece of furniture,

to which he has emotional ties: a big, simple table that was his favorite through more than thirty years.

"For more than ten years M. lived summer and winter on St. Margaret's Island, at the middle of the Danube, in a room of the old three-story hotel. When he moved in, there was no table in the room. A long, green restaurant table for six was moved up from the hotel garden restaurant into his room. On this table he wrote many of his plays, his first novels, and, he says, his most despairing letters.

"When he afterward moved out of the hotel, the management made him a present of the table. He took it along to his new two-room apartment, which he later enlarged by an extra room on account of his constantly growing library. It was at this table that Eva Le Gallienne sat as a luncheon guest after World War One; in 1921 she played Julie, the feminine lead in the New York Theater Guild production of *Liliom*, and after the run she went to Budapest to visit the author of the play. The beautiful young American actress was the only woman at the lunch M. gave in her honor. All the rest were men—authors, directors, actors, and so forth. (As it was Sunday, M. took Miss Le Gallienne to the amusement park after lunch. When she saw all the Lilioms and Julies there, and realized that everything they had played in New York actually existed, tears came to her eyes. Twenty years later Miss Le Gallienne called on M. here in New York, and they talked for a long time of that summer Sunday afternoon.)

"John Galsworthy and his wife had lunch at this same table afterward, and another time the French playwright Denys Amiel; others who often took lunch or dinner or

afternoon coffee at it were Max Reinhardt, Gilbert and Kitty Miller, Max Pallenberg, the great Hungarian poet Endre Ady, M's composer friends Albert Sirnay, Victor Jacobi, Pongrác Kacsóh; here sat M's late, dearly beloved friend István Bárczy, for decades the mayor of Budapest, telling his fabulous Hungarian peasant stories night after night. By this table M. read his plays aloud from the manuscript to his 'discoverer,' the theater manager Ladislav Beöthy, and to the actor who had the lead in most of his plays in Hungary, Gyula Hegedüs; here, when he was in Budapest, sat Felix Salten, the author of *Bambi*, and many, many people who, as M. put it, were near and dear to his heart.

"And around that same table on June 9, 1926, sat a little party consisting of the chief of the Second District Registry Office, his clerk, two witnesses, and M. and Lili, who were married there."

¶ (The above-mentioned István Bárczy, for decades not only the most gifted but the most popular mayor of Budapest, was a wise man with an extraordinary sense of humor. He often came to call at my two room apartment, whose windows opened, across a very narrow street, straight upon the Second Ward firehouse. My apartment was on the mezzanine, with a balcony. One night when Bárczy and some other friends were with me, we found ourselves feeling no pain, and in our "elevation of spirits" we opened the balcony door. Within a minute all the firemen were assembled in the alley below, they knew the number of the mayor's car, and so were always aware of

it when their powerful boss called on me. Bárzy delivered a merry harangue to the assembled firemen, exhorting them that in case of fire their chief duty would be to save me and my library. The speech was received in the nocturnal stillness of the little street with wild applause—not for me, but for the omnipotent superior of all fire-fighters. Then a veritable rain of cigars, cigarettes, and even edibles poured down from our balcony upon the ranks of firemen below, who neatly caught the flying presents in their helmets. When we went back into the room, somebody remarked that it was the very height of safety to live so near the friendly fire department, particularly after such a speech. To this Bárzy made the objection whose basic idea I first exploited in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, then elaborated as the thoughts of a “skeptical young man” in the book published in New York by Duell, Sloan and Pearce, *The Captain of St. Margaret’s*, as follows:

“The apartment was one hundred per cent fireproof. It was on the second floor, with windows and balcony giving on a quiet, narrow street, and opposite my balcony was the fire-station of the Second Ward. Three tremendous arched doors, within which stood three red automobile monsters covered with ladders, hose, nickel and brass trimmings—all the innovations of modern fire-fighting. I had been living there for years, and I practically knew each fireman personally. As I read in bed with the window open of a quiet night, I would often hear the alarms come in by telephone across the way. Then I would put down my book and go out on the balcony; by the time I was out, the three big doors would be open,

the huge, fire-eyed dragons would have crawled from their caves, and my brave friends would be sitting in neat rows on the backs of the motorized monsters, shouting to me where the fire was. Then they would rush off with dreadful ringing and the howl of sirens. I would not go back to bed, but would keep on reading at my desk, waiting for them to return. There was something atavistic about it: my father had been a doctor, and whenever he had an urgent call by night, we used to sit up and wait for him to get back.

“In short, these are the essential points: 1. My apartment was about a hundred feet from an up-to-date fire department; 2. I was on terms of personal friendship with the firemen; 3. My apartment was on the second floor; 4. My windows were large, and directly opposite the windows of the fire-station. That is, if (God forbid) a fire had broken out in my apartment, we should have had the rare situation wherein the firemen would not even have had to leave their building, but could simply have put out the fire by playing the hose from their own quarters into mine. And this with even more zeal than usual, since a good friend was involved. Never since the invention of fire departments had there been an apartment better situated with respect to the fire-station. Exaggerating very slightly, I might even say I was living in the fire-station itself. Yet even so I was more afraid than anyone that my apartment would be gutted some day. Why? Because what I have just told was *too beautiful*. When I thought of the relationship between my apartment and fire, the thing that ran through my mind was not what

I have been setting down, but the following dialogue between two of my friends:

" 'Did you hear? M's apartment was completely burned out!'

" 'You don't say! How did it happen?'

" 'Just imagine his apartment is across from the fire-station, he has known the firemen personally for years, he lives on the second floor, his great big windows are directly opposite the fire station, and *still, still* his apartment burned!'

"I could never shake off the notion that this sentence was so natural, its form so oft-heard, so healthy and human, the breath of life and experience so apparent in it, that this one was closest to truth, not the sentence above in which I have listed my safeguards. How often have I heard someone say, 'And just imagine, that woman, that respectable mother of a family with four children, and not even pretty, who has hardly stirred out of the house in twenty years, who has sacrificed herself to her husband and children, never worn a smart dress, never gone to the theater or out in society, never danced, who has attended church regularly: that model of decency and morality, just imagine, *that* woman ran away yesterday with a taxi driver, and took all her husband's securities with her!' Or: 'And just imagine, that cashier, the pride of the firm for forty years, . . . with never a penny missing in forty years, . . . why, *that's* the man who absconded last night after embezzling hundreds of thousands!' And the everlasting, invariable story of the man who was never sick in his life, and yet just now, all of a sudden died. No,

I hate perfect things. They are upsetting, frightening. They make me uneasy."

To prove that things are truly beautiful only when some flaw can be found in them, the "skeptical man," actually Bárczy (who incidentally wrote a fine *Life of Jesus*), quoted the wise Hungarian Cardinal Pázmány, who once said that St. Paul was the greatest of saints *because there was a fault in his life*—his hostility toward Jesus's disciples before his experience on the road to Damascus.

(The moment I began to write these chapters, I thought of a sentence that I felt I must bring into this book somewhere, if possible in the preface. The sentence reads as follows:

"Naturally, like any human being, Wanda had her faults. Either I did not even notice them, or I hastily forgot them. In this book the reader will find no criticism of her, however slight. After the way she behaved to me in this earthly life, and particularly in the worst years of it, the very least I owe her is to be not her judge but her panegyrist."

Now I feel that the proper place for this sentence is somewhere about here, near the paradoxical praise of Paul by the cardinal. Not that the two cases have any similarity whatsoever. It is simply a matter of vague, instinctive feeling. Or, to be as exact as I can, I cherish this paradox in praise of Paul as the most human eulogy that anyone could imagine. I call it a paradox that not only

fits but definitely belongs in any honest praise of a truly good soul.)

¶ “When M. was living on St. Margaret’s Island, the restaurant-keeper there, who distilled his own liquor, gave M. a big two-liter (over half a gallon) bottle of good home-made brandy. He drank a very little of it every day, but the chambermaid and the house man drank all the more in M’s absence. ‘That wouldn’t have been so bad,’ said M., ‘but they kept adding water so that I shouldn’t notice the disappearance. When I got suspicious because the liquor kept tasting weaker and weaker, I began measuring the level of the brandy every day with a ruler, and writing it down. I didn’t make any fuss, until finally, even though I took a drink, I found more in the bottle the next day than there had been before.’ ”

(I put this incident into my play, *The Glass Slipper*. The story was one of Wanda’s favorites, which she told over and over again.)

¶ “Yesterday M. dictated to me a long letter in German to Karlheinz Martin and Hans Albers in Berlin. The letter is going to Berlin through a soldier by way of Hollywood, because civilian postal service has not yet been restored. The letter is a reply to one from Martin and Albers. They wrote how happy they were that his play *Liliom*, which Martin directed, and whose title role was played hundreds of times before Hitler in Berlin by Hans Albers (the most popular German movie actor), was

running again now. When Hitler came into power, Albers had to drop the play abruptly. Immediately upon the liberation of Berlin he simply started the show again at the Hebbel Theater, where it promises to run for hundreds more performances. We sent cordial thanks to Albers, who was not only one of M's chief actors but a personal friend as well. We know Albers was in Berlin during the Nazi regime as a leading UFA actor, but he steadfastly refused to appear in any hate-mongering film. A letter from Berlin told us that when this attitude of Albers's began to annoy Goebbels, who was the film dictator and of a vengeful disposition, Albers played a trick on the Nazis. He pretended he had broken his leg. A dependable doctor friend put Albers's perfectly sound leg in a cast, and he lay in a hospital for a month while the picture was being made without him.

"Aside from Albers M. had only one friend among the German actors, Max Pallenberg. M. considered Pallenberg the greatest comedian of our time, on a level with Chaplin at the very least. He felt that Oscar Sauer was the greatest German dramatic actor. He saw Sauer, a handsome, golden-blond, true German type, toward the end of his career, when he was playing Ibsen in Berlin, although already ill. His legs were paralyzed. His director was Otto Brahm, whom the Germans called the Pope of the Theater, the real discoverer of Ibsen so far as the world at large went. His position in the German theater was equivalent to that of Stanislavsky in Russia. Brahm staged the Ibsen plays where Sauer took the lead in such a way that Sauer, who by then could scarcely walk, was always either sitting, leaning against a piece of furniture, or

holding the arm of another actor. This was how M. saw him play *Little Eyolf*. Sauer died before Pallenberg.

"Pallenberg's death took place under tragic circumstances. One summer M. had a supper ready for him in Karlsbad, the world-famous Czechish watering-place where Pallenberg was to make a guest appearance at the theater. Pallenberg's plane, in which he had flown from Prague to Karlsbad (less than an hour's flight) crashed on arrival at Karlsbad airfield from a height of ninety feet. Pallenberg, one fellow-passenger, and the pilot were instantly killed. He had already put on his hat, top-coat and gloves. It was a chartered plane, because Pallenberg had been unable to get a seat on the scheduled flight. It was a defective machine, long called the 'flying coffin' by the Czech pilots, who warned Pallenberg jokingly when he got aboard. He insisted, however, because the performance was advertised for that evening, and he had been brought up with a superstitious respect for the notion that the show must go on.

"M. only heard about the accident in the evening when he strolled over to the theater to welcome Pallenberg before the performance. On the theater door he saw a poster announcing that the performance was canceled and why. To make the tragedy yet more grievous, a Budapest paper, *Pesti Napló*, telephoned at midnight to M. who was completely crushed by his friend's death, and made him dictate a three-column account of the affair.

"According to M, Pallenberg was one of the world's most amusing companions in private, the classic jester in the Shakespearean sense. He played practical jokes on everyone. M. was once the butt of the following. Lon-

ago, during the Weimar Republic, M. spent a summer in Munich, where a theatrical and operatic festival was in progress. Pallenberg was playing in one of his favorite vehicles, a play called *The Schimek Family*, a corny old farce, but one that provided Pallenberg with his best part. Pallenberg invited M. to supper after the show. To help him pass the time, Pallenberg gave M. an aisle seat in the second row. During intermission, M. went up to Pallenberg's dressing-room. Pallenberg asked him, 'Did you look at your neighbor?'

" 'Not particularly,' said M.

"Pallenberg asked, 'What did you notice about him?'

" 'Nothing in particular,' said M., 'except that he looks like a journeyman carpenter, is unshaven, and whenever he laughs at your gags he covers his face with both hands as if he were ashamed of laughing.'

" 'Do you know who he is?' asked Pallenberg.

" 'No,' was the answer.

"Pallenberg said, 'That's Hitler, the famous rabble-rouser. I gave you a seat next to him on purpose.' (Even then Hitler was the most feared man in Germany.)

" 'The bell rang for the start of the last act. 'Go on out front, it's about to start,' said Pallenberg.

" 'Not me,' said M., 'I'll wait here in your dressing room.'

" 'What?' laughed Pallenberg. 'Are you afraid he'll bite you?'

" 'He might, at that,' said M.—When M. told me this story, he added, 'He did bite me, too, but good—only ten years later.' "

¶ "Several times when we went for a walk in Central Park and M. saw a very old man with a long white beard, handle-bar mustache and bushy snow-white hair, walking with a stoop, he said: 'There goes Hitler.' He says he sometimes cannot help believing that Hitler is alive and lives with just such a makeup in the very city where nobody is supposed to look for him New York."

¶ "Late in the afternoon we saw one of my great idols, Toscanini, sitting in the sidewalk cafe of the St. Moritz with an elderly lady, no doubt his wife, and looking out on Central Park. Apparently it was before some concert. We watched him for perhaps fifteen minutes. He did not say a word, but looked into space, sunk in thought. This is the only time I have ever seen him except in a concert-hall. His eyes are not to be forgotten, even without music."

¶ (From a letter to a woman friend in London) "Being a music-lover and passionate concert goer, you will appreciate this, which M. told me about. At three o'clock in the morning, many years ago, he came back tired and sleepy to his hotel room in Vienna. He undressed and went to bed. He discovered to his exasperation that loud and boisterous music was going on in the room just over his. A piano and a violin apparently trying to outdo each

other. M. angrily picked up the telephone, and called the night clerk in the lobby, complaining that he was not being given a chance to sleep at half past three in the morning. The night clerk told him he would take care of it at once. He must certainly have telephoned up to the noisy players, because scarcely a moment had passed before there was complete silence in the room.

"At noon the next day, when M. was leaving the hotel, when he passed by the desk, he upbraided the manager, and asked him who the people had been last night.

"Telling me the story now, M. said: 'It was one of the most ludicrous situations in my life, because the manager said that the two people playing in the room above were Jascha Heifetz and Vladimir Horowitz. They were both in Vienna for concerts. One of the two had a birthday that day, and the world's best violinist and the world's best pianist had celebrated the occasion over a bottle of champagne by playing the world's most beautiful concert pieces for their own enjoyment, to themselves and to each other, with no other guests.' And this was the concert M. stopped in its first few minutes, of course quite unsuspectingly! Not to mention that in addition to the artistic treat, this concert would have been entirely gratis."

¶ "Joseph Pasternak, the MGM producer, came to see M. this afternoon. We spoke Hungarian with him. He detailed his idea of a successful film story. I took down every word in shorthand, and transcribed it that night. At his request, M. later wrote him a story based on these

specifications, from my notes. I made nine pages of it, and M. made 197."

¶ "Victor Jacobi, an outstanding Hungarian composer of operettas, who emigrated to New York in 1914, died here in the midst of his success after World War I, and is buried here. While he lived in Budapest he was an intimate friend of M's and of our friend the equally eminent Hungarian composer Dr. Albert Sirnay, who has lived in New York for decades, and is head editor of Chappell & Co., the music publishers. In their younger days there were years when the three met almost every evening. Jacobi and Sirnay were then writing sweet and successful operetta music. M. was doing his first comedies.

"M. confesses almost remorsefully that although in his early youth he enjoyed playing pranks on his friends, the only practical joke that really scared him, and that he afterward regretted, was one he played on Jacobi. M. revived this memory when we had dinner with Sirnay. They talked a lot about Jacobi, who was a genuine artist and a charming talent. Both M. and Sirnay were extremely fond of him.

"The joke, whose horror will be keenest to composers, came one summer while Jacobi was writing his later internationally famous operetta, *Sibyl*. For several weeks the friendly gatherings of the three grew less frequent, because Jacobi retired to his apartment to work. He went but seldom to the writers' and actors' club called *Ottobon* (meaning *home*), where he ordinarily met M. every day and went backstage at the operetta theater to foregather

with Sirmay. Jacobi said he was up to his ears in work, slaving over the composition and orchestration of his new operetta.

"M. was then living at the hotel on St. Margaret's Island, in the middle of the Danube. Usually he would go home between two and three at night, traveling the long distance to the bridge across the island in one of the one-horse cabs that were still universal. His road took him from the center of town to the island by way, among others, of the quiet little street where Jacobi lived on the second floor of an apartment house. At about three o'clock one night, on toward dawn, as the rubber-tired cab was noiselessly approaching Jacobi's place, M. noticed that Jacobi's windows were open, his room lit up, and piano music was sounding out in the still of the night. M. stopped the cab to listen.

"Jacobi was playing the piano, over and over again a sweet-toned waltz that later became famous practically throughout the world by its success in *Sibyl*. It is a very beautiful, melodious waltz with a faint, melancholy undertone, undoubtedly the finest of Jacobi's many tunes.

"M. sat in the cab below, listening attentively. In the room upstairs Jacobi, obviously excited in this moment of artistic creation, kept passionately repeating the same music. M. says he could see in his mind's eye a little table beside the piano, on which the composer would write down on music paper, during his occasional brief pauses in playing, the phrases and turns of his new work. The repetition of the ingratiating tune was unending. M. already knew it by heart. He signaled to the cabman, and they drove on. M. went home to the island, humming the

tune all the way. (His usual working hours were from three to eight a.m.)

"One afternoon about a week later Jacobi came into the club. 'I've been working hard,' he said, 'so I'm taking a day off to rest up.' He sat down to kibitz on M., who was playing cards with a newspaperman. They greeted one another. M. went right on with the game, but after a few minutes he began quite idly humming to himself, as he fingered his cards, the waltz he had heard that night.

"Jacobi had just picked up a cup of coffee; the cup halted in mid-air. Then he put it down gingerly on the table before him without drinking. He spoke not a word.

"After a while, still playing cards, M. began humming the waltz again, very softly. Jacobi, the politest and most unassuming of men, whispered to M.: 'You don't mind if I disturb your game by asking a question?'

" 'Nor at all,' said M., intently studying his hand and finally playing a card.

"Jacobi whispered shyly in M's ear, 'What was that tune you were just humming?'

" 'The tune?' said M., absorbed in studying his hand. 'Oh, it's a waltz from some French operetta I heard in Paris. It's been very popular there.'

"Jacobi turned white. 'Who wrote it?' he whispered hoarsely, almost inaudibly.

" 'I don't know,' said M., busying himself with his cards. 'It might have been Audran, or Lecocq, or Planquette, or Hervé . . . possibly Christiné . . . I don't really remember. All I know is it was a hit in Paris.'

"Jacobi got up, went out, had a long telephone conversation, and came back. He sat down beside M. again.

“ ‘I’ve just telephoned to my publisher,’ he said, ‘about that waltz. I’ve simply got to get hold of a copy of this Paris tune.’ ”

“M., looking at him, saw that he was quite pale, his lips bloodless. M. was shocked. Getting up from the card table, he took Jacobi over into a corner, where he explained the whole story. When he was finished, tears gleamed in Jacobi’s eyes.

“M. says he still doesn’t know just what it was that set Jacobi’s tear glands to work. Was it simply the result of a sudden thawing of the tension, or were they tears of joy after the awful scare about the suspicion that so often torments decent composers when they write a tune—mayn’t this be simply a memory of something heard long before?

“M. and Sirmay debated whether this prank was cruel on M’s part. Sirmay argued that it was.

“ ‘So you say as a composer, and I see your point,’ M. agreed, but then added, ‘For my part, I say it was just youth. I heedless, and alas never-to-be-regained, youth.’ ”

§ “We had dinner with Dr. and Mrs. László in a booth at the Barbizon Delicatessen, and from a distance looked on at M’s first meeting with Walter Winchell. Then M. reported to us. He said Winchell spoke warmly to him. M. calculates that he has read more than a thousand of Winchell’s columns. During their short conversation an actress, Miss Basquette, came up to Winchell, from the counter where she had been shopping. Winchell introduced M. to her. She held out her hand, and when M.

took it, she pressed his hand to her cheek. The gesture looked like Miss Basquette kissing M's hand. This practically instantaneous incident was reported the next day in a line and a half of WW's column. M. says this line and a half is a model of concise, accurate, tactful, and kindly journalism."

¶ "I went into M's room on his birthday, January 12. 'Congratulations,' I said to him. 'You're sixty-eight today.'

"He said, 'It's your fault.'

"I asked, 'How do you mean, my fault?'

"He said, 'If you hadn't rushed down in the middle of the night two years ago when I was so ill, and saved my life, I'd only be sixty-six now.'"

(To this note I will add that it was one of her "May I write it home?" stories.)

¶ "We were guests of Gilbert Miller, the son-in-law of the late Jules Bache, at Bache's estate near Lake Placid. We met a very pleasant man there. His name is Pereira, the singer Grace Moore's husband. He mentioned that Grace Moore had recently published a book of her memoirs, in which it comes out that Grace Moore saw M. in Salzburg in 1923; she did not know him personally, but she did know he had been aimlessly wandering among the Austrian mountains on account of an unhappy love affair. M. actually remembered seeing Grace Moore in Munich and Salzburg at that time, in the company of the com-

poser Vincent Youmans and Rudolph Kommer. He says she was beautiful and undoubtedly witty, because all he could see from a distance was that Kommer and Youmans held their sides with laughter at everything she said."

§ "Terrible news in the paper. The Germans shot down over the Atlantic the airliner aboard which Leslie Howard was a passenger. All Broadway is mourning this magnificent actor as if he were a close relative. I knew Howard, whose family was of Hungarian extraction, only from his films. But at one time M. saw a good deal of him. This was in America in 1928, and later in Berlin. The last time he saw him was in a joint in Berlin. Along toward dawn three of them were sitting at a corner table: M., Leslie Howard, and Anna May Wong, the Chinese actress. Howard whispered in M's ear: 'I see you're surprised; that's good guessing, because in the time we've been sitting here I've fallen in love with Anna May Wong. But don't worry; I'll be over it in an hour.' The three of them sat there for a long time, eating and drinking beer. Finally Leslie Howard looked at his watch, and said with a sigh of relief, 'I was right; it's over.' "

§ "A few days ago the mail brought back from Budapest a letter that M. wrote on October 30, 1941, to our best friend there, dear, kind, lovable Lóri Barabás, who originally introduced me to M. at the Metropol Restaurant in Budapest. The envelope opened, resealed, and stamped by the censors of three nations bore the Hungarian

words: *Deceased. Return to sender.* Lóri, who had previously lost his job as a newspaperman, died in 1941. The letter that he never saw traveled around for five full years before returning now, in 1946. We put it unopened with our other letters in our files."

(Let me remark here in addition to this note that I wrote into the chief figure of my novel, *Farewell My Heart*, published by Simon & Schuster in New York in 1945, much of the life and character of my dear and faithful friend Lóri Barabás.)

¶ (From a letter of hers in 1947) "M. became an American citizen today. When he came home, still somewhat under the influence of his experience, he told the following. While the judge was taking down the routine details and examining him as usual, he looked at a paper, and asked him, 'What's your name?' M. gave his name.

" 'What's your occupation?' asked the judge.

" 'Author and playwright,' M. replied.

"The judge, a young man with a discharge button in his buttonhole, said bashfully to him, 'I'm not asking because I don't know what your occupation is, and all the things you've written besides *Liliom*, but just because the law requires me to ask you that in the presence of your two witnesses.'

"M. too, was abashed, and merely said, 'Thank you.' In fact he was so much embarrassed that afternoon, when the judge asked him in the course of the examination what freedoms the constitution guaranteed him as a citizen, the only one he forgot was the one he makes his living by,

freedom of the press. Though I wrote you at the time, I now repeat proudly that I became an American citizen a year ahead of M., in the summer of 1946."

¶ "At long last I have met Barbara Bemelmans. I have heard so much about her. M. has been raving about her for a long time. M. is very fond of the Bemelmans family. Ludwig Bemelmans is a universally well-liked humorous writer and artist. Writers, publishers, and the public as well are devoted to him. Not so long ago he was a waiter in a hotel restaurant here in New York. He still often takes his friends to the same restaurant, and happily welcomes the greetings of his former co-workers, who are proud and fond of him. His family was Bavarian, but he has lived in America since boyhood. His uncle was a Catholic bishop in Bavaria. He has published a great many books and articles, mostly illustrated with his own drawings. M. not only thinks highly of him as a writer and artist, but considers him unique as a raconteur. I laughed out loud when I read his two extremely original humorous books. *Small Beer* I liked especially. Recently the Bemelmans' invited us to lunch—Bemelmans, his wife, who is a fragile, soft-spoken, cultivated little woman, and the family sensation, Barbara, their only child.

"Barbara is ten. Beyond all doubt the most graceful, most intelligent, cleverest, most interesting, most grown-up, and most adaptable child I have ever seen. She fits herself with unfailing tact and almost automatically to the ever-changing subjects of a conversation. She has a perfect womanly figure in miniature. Her walk is per-

fectly balanced. Her eyes are so shrewd and penetrating that it embarrasses you, in spite of her sweet little smile. She is admirably brought up. She does not talk much, but when her musical little voice is heard, it is all charm and humor. In the quiet little restaurant where the five of us had lunch, I never looked at anything but Barbara the whole time. No wonder Goddard Lieberson wrote a novel about her. The only way I can convey my impression of Barbara is that when we said goodbye after lunch I felt like crying. Barbara is a little creature quite out of this world, and she brings tears to the eyes of every childless woman she meets."

§ "Yesterday I saw Greta Garbo again at Dr. László's; I don't know how many times I've seen her. GRETA GARBO! I keep wishing I could see her over and over again."

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There was a great deal that she wanted to see. There were a great many people whom she still wanted to see and see again. With most of them she did not even want to make acquaintance only to see them. To see as many interesting human beings as possible, as quickly as possible.

She was in a hurry . . .

CHAPTER 9

NEITHER here nor in Europe have I been in the habit of saving the newspaper articles and reviews about myself and my work. People have found it hard to believe, and still do, that in 1916—thirty-two years ago—I stopped buying all the morning papers the day after an opening as I had always done before. That was the year a number of Budapest papers attacked my play, *Fashions for Men*, for contemptible and completely personal reasons. I knew days beforehand why, and at the desire of what vengeful and influential ally, this would happen. I have developed a morbid horror of this buying of all the papers the morning after an opening. All I do is skim nervously and hastily through the review in the one paper I take. Here it is the *New York Times*; in Berlin it used to be the *Berliner Tageblatt*;

in Vienna the *Neue Freie Presse*. I have read so few Italian, French, English, and other newspaper reviews during my forty-six years of playwriting that they amount to practically nothing. (On the day I look over these lines, April 1, 1948, I read in the *New York Post* that there are not only people like me, but also people who believe it possible for someone in show business not to be susceptible to publicity. Otherwise Leonard Lyons would not have said in print that the many-sided American artist Oscar Levant, asked how he reacted to publicity about himself, replied, "I'm completely indifferent to publicity. Frankly, with me it's a sleeping pill one way or the other.")

Wanda read every word she could get hold of about me for fifteen years, and carefully kept the clippings. Usually she did not even mention the articles to me.

I have almost forgotten the very names of most of the characters in my forty-one plays. Wanda scrupulously remembered the names of even the most incidental characters in each play. She knew the names of the actors who played the parts in different countries. She had a huge collection of newspaper clippings, programs, and photographs, the greater part of which was lost in the seven years up to 1940 as we wandered from country to country, in Budapest, Vienna, Venice, Paris, and Geneva. The remnants, and what she collected in America up to 1947, she filed in large envelopes. She never talked much to me about them. Occasionally, she would ask me for one of my books, which I picked up with great difficulty in New York second-hand stores after the Germans and Hungarian book-burnings. She wanted them for her own little

"library." She often asked for my manuscripts. But I did not give them to her. I had them on the shelves in my closet, above her coffee kitchen, and every time she asked me I would say, "Don't be in such a hurry; when I die all the books and manuscripts will be yours anyway."

In October, 1947, I put together and arranged the contents of her envelopes, along with all the books and manuscripts I had promised her at my death. I had the manuscripts and clippings mounted and bound in scrapbooks, having decided to offer the whole collection to the New York Public Library in memory of Wanda. I knew that George Freedley, the drama critic, then curator of the New York Public Library Theater Collection, was very actively assembling play manuscripts and books. I got two orange labels printed, and pasted two into each book. The smaller says, "COLLECTION WANDA BARTHA"; the larger one reads: "The author presents this book to the New York Public Library in memory of his dearly beloved friend and literary adviser WANDA BARTHA † August 28, 1947, to whom he had intended to bequeath all his books and manuscripts." One of the reasons why I asked this particular library to accept the collection was that Wanda once did a very thorough job of research for me there, and told me with great pleasure how kind and helpful everyone at the library had been.



It was at this time that she dug up for me from old books valuable material about the life and miraculous deeds of St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. She copied the

accounts of the miracles in Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend, or Lives of the Saints* (1483), and S. Barling Gould's *The Lives of the Saints* (1872), and brought them to me in triumph. What she found then she saw later at the rehearsals of my dramatic legend, *Miracle in the Mountains*, originally written twenty years ago, published in 1911, and produced on a special occasion in Budapest in 1936, then rewritten and unsuccessfully produced here in 1947. But she saw just parts of the original play and even those only at a couple of early rehearsals. Because I quickly ruined the play.

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Originally the play simply told with utmost simplicity a single miraculous adventure of the great and most romantic saint, the patron of all children; in New York I myself spoiled it, owing chiefly to my dwindling self-confidence, by heeding the advice of "expert" outsiders who, I learned later, had no other connection with the theater than that of investing money in plays. I modernized its medieval tone and completely distorted its meaning so that I, myself, was horrified as the opening came near. Wanda eagerly sacrificed her days and nights to help me at rehearsals. She also helped the director, who, over my protest, printed my name on the program as director. Wanda was in despair over the murderous changes (most of which I made myself) and the casting of good actors in roles unsuitable to them.

I ruined the play partly because I was easily influenced (usually a result of insecurity in refugees) and partly under the pressure of responsibility toward my producers,

who had collected from their friends an uncommonly large sum of money to finance this very doubtful risk.

At first, when we were alone, she ventured a few sound critical remarks. But later, when she saw her misgivings did not impress me, she was frightened into stopping her criticism. She merely said, "You understand the profession better than I do," and crouched unhappily in a corner at rehearsals along with my wife Lili and Sam Jaffe, who already knew that the business was bound to end badly. And so indeed it did. The play flopped miserably. The notices were devastating.

This was a bitter pill for Wanda. Obeying her, I did not read a single notice. At that time she was often to be seen in dark glasses. On the day when the bad reviews appeared, she wrote to her friend Lucie in Paris: "M. is a wise man; he's already at his desk, busy with his new work. But my heart is broken."



Mr. Ralph A. Beals, the director of the New York Public Library, and Mr. George Freedley accepted the bulky package from me on November 12 in the office of the library director. I was very restless that morning, because I wanted to present the package personally to those learned gentlemen, and I was afraid I should disgrace myself by lack of self-control at the age of seventy in the presence of these grave scholars.

I was still suffering under the acute neurosis produced by the shock. I was afraid it would not be in my power to behave so normally as they would expect me to. I knew

that if I failed it would make a most unfortunate impression (quite rightly, I agree) anywhere, but here above all. So I asked Sam Jaffe to accompany me on this call, like a hospital orderly. He was to try to make a normal, well-balanced old man out of me for that short time.

Sam came for me in the morning, and together we took down and presented the package to the director of the library and the curator of the theater collection. During the whole time Sam managed to make a calm old man out of me. Our group was photographed. During that procedure, I behaved perfectly normally, but later, when I saw the photographs, I was amazed to see how cruelly they showed in my face everything I had so much wanted to conceal.

On the first page of a folder in this collection is pasted a snapshot of Wanda, which I consider the best American photograph of her. Beside the picture I wrote and signed the following foreword to the collection: "This collection is dedicated to Wanda Bartha, my dearly beloved good friend and literary adviser, faithful companion of my bitter exile, who, for fifteen years, voluntarily and unselfishly accompanied me in my wanderings everywhere. She died, untimely, in New York, August 28, 1947. To commemorate her life the collection of my books, manuscripts, photographs and newspaper clippings of biographical interest which I had intended to bequeath to her, has been presented to the New York Public Library. —October 25, 1947."

When we came down from Mr. Beals' office, where the whole collection had been beautifully laid out on a table (a bier, flashed through my mind as I saw it), Sam bade

me goodbye, and went about his business. I stayed there on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42d Street that cloudy, almost dark fall morning, before the classic façade of the library building, and stood for a long time aimlessly gazing at the close-packed cars on Fifth Avenue.



The calming and normalizing effect of the spiritual bromide Sam had administered to me began to wear off after he left. I began to force upon myself the idea that in the drone of Fifth Avenue traffic I could hear Wanda's soft voice. I began thinking, pouring my thoughts into the morbid form of a dialogue with her.

"Are you sad?" she asked.

I said, "Yes."

"On my account?"

(That was an apt beginning, because this very exchange had taken place between us uncounted times in the past few years.)

"Yes, dearest," I answered. "I have a feeling as if I had just come from a sort of funeral. As if a traveler from afar had buried in this great and beautiful big cemetery, built by the sons of another nation, all the remaining scraps of a long writing career. He has buried even the career itself. And, not having a sedative in his pocket now, he feels he has also buried his future ambitions. He has buried his desire to live, the very feeling that he is a living being at all, even the unfounded notion that he has got to go on living. This enormous mass of books, swallowing up mine like a drop of water in the sea, belongs mostly to dead authors: only a few of the writers are still living.

I have a feeling that this morning I buried myself along with you, not asking your permission. Now there are two names on each of my books and manuscripts there—yours and mine.

"Both Mr. Beals and Mr. Freedley were more than considerate of me in the office. There can be no doubt that they sensed my mood. Yet nevertheless, as I look back now at the solemn building, I have a feeling that the two of us, strangers coming from afar, are interlopers there, burying ourselves illicitly and by stealth in a single grave through my self-will. This feeling that I have now is what I have often talked of to you as one of my alleged faults among the many real ones. People call it 'self-pity.' "



In recent years I have very often heard the expression spoken in a tone of contempt. (The same applies to this word as I set forth earlier about the word "Ghoulish.") Whenever I have tried, no matter how timidly, to argue against that tone, I have always found myself alone in my opinion. Now I remembered once more how completely I had always failed to understand the contempt for self-pity. People whose judgment I respect have told me that this contempt was not natural. They said it was artificial, and that it was not actually American. It first shocked me when one of the war's bravest fighters, General Patton, who lived through uncounted nerve-racking excitements and finally paid for his military career with his life, publicly burst into tears out of sheer emotion at a testimonial dinner in Boston, and had to cover his face with his hand-

merchief. The photographers snapped the scene, and printed the pictures in their papers. Some of the papers ran mildly ironical captions. (No one was moved by the affair.) A New York acquaintance of mine whom I told that the picture was touching said it was not touching, but ridiculous. There is no denying that I still remain very much alone in my feeling. What is more, I even knew people who not merely laughed at the general, but violently disapproved of him for this sign of true humanity, which I too, under pressure, will now call an accident.

Apparently, despite the advances of science, the time has yet to come when we shall no longer hear scornful and disparaging terms applied to a condition that any doctor will tell you is a disease of the nervous system—exactly as bronchitis is a disease of the bronchial tubes, or myopia a disease of the eye. This scoffing tendency is all the more jarring because the day has long since passed when a sufferer from bronchitis was angrily called an ill-mannered barker, or a short-sighted person scornfully described as having the bad habit of reading with his nose instead of his eyes.

Lesions of the nervous system, traumatically produced by spiritual shocks, are not, as they were in the nineteenth century, things you have to "take like a man," but things you have to take to the doctor.

The fact that I don't take mine to the doctor does not alter the case.



And the pictures of soldiers with amputated arms or legs. The photographers (who after all represent the

view of most of their audience), urged soldiers who had lost both legs to grin gleefully into the camera. How many such pictures I have seen! I agree that the unlucky amputees must be encouraged to help themselves and to go on living as good a life as they can even without legs. But I will bet anything that when those soldiers had their pictures taken they were not in the happy frame of mind that their photographs exhibit. Quite certainly they must have felt sorry for themselves over their lost legs. In a discussion of this subject that I once engaged in, someone said it was very convincing and reassuring, i.e. a highly humanitarian journalistic proof of medical progress to display people whose legs had been amputated who were capable of smiling at the camera. I remarked that so far as I was concerned, the combination of medical progress and amputated legs was shown much more convincingly and reassuringly by four lines that appeared in the Vienna papers after the popular and dearly beloved Viennese actor Alexander Girardi, who suffered severely from diabetes, had a leg amputated. The hospital director sent out a notice to the newspapers requesting the public, if anyone should have any contact with Girardi, not to upset him by mentioning that he had had a leg cut off, *because he did not know about it*. In my opinion that is a convincing and reassuring proof of medical progress—not poor crippled soldiers grinning, obviously under compulsion, into a commercial camera.



Self-pity! I have yet to discover the real reason why so many people despise and deride it. I do not see why

this unconfessed but constant campaign against self-pity does not take its cue from the American and English poets. Why do they follow the lead of night-club habitués reveling in poses and affectations, of callous fight-promoters, or of generals grown famous by the wounds of common soldiers?

So far I have failed to find an acceptable explanation of the disdain and ridicule poured upon this natural emotion. I can only suppose that some hidden and powerful financial, political, or military interest requires this usually so kind-hearted people to force itself into such an attitude. Having been born in central Europe, brought up in the nineteenth century, having tried to improve my mind with French and Russian literature as well as that of my native country, and living as I now do among a nation frankly addicted to pity and human sympathy, even sentimentality—with all this, even if I should live to be a hundred, I should still never have any use for this by no means American, and certainly not Continental, but decidedly British attitude toward human suffering and its manifestations.

Self-pity!

When Jesus on the cross "cried with a loud voice, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*" . . . What was it, what was it, if not the most moving and imperishable example of self-pity in all history?



How did the sixteenth-century Puritans, the real spiritual forebears of today's heroes of self-control,

haughty scorers of any failure to hide pain, judge that loud outcry of lamentation from the Psalm?



"I'm not ashamed of myself, dear," I told her behind my closed lips and clenched teeth as I stood there on the corner of 42d Street. "I'm not even ashamed in this supereilious society for pitying myself so unspeakably, because you left me alone in my old age, in this cold, dark, upset world, which is quite without hope for me. I had only one tiny guiding light, one prop, one friend, one adviser, one helper, and you were it."

I stood there for a long time in my dark glasses on the noisy corner, saying nothing.

"You're crying again," she said. "That's awful. Hold it back."

"I can't. I'm simply incapable of it. Yes, I remember the pictures of General Patton all right, and the things we heard people say about them. On the advice of friends I took a chloral-hydrate cure. A pheno-barbital cure. A benzedrine cure. All to help me control myself. None of them did me any good. And anyway what difference will it make to my condition or the condition of the world if I use strength of mind or drugs to keep a few drops of warm salt water forcibly in my system instead of letting them flow out?"

"Remember," she said, "some of the lines of the play that you're working on now, that we polished up together in Montauk last summer. Remember the dialogue where the doctor teaches his patient that fretting and worrying make his suprarenal, i.e. adrenal glands secrete

too much adrenalin, which has a pronounced effect on a weak heart."

"All right, dear, I'll remember it."



Then suddenly I had a feeling that I ought to accuse myself. This was not the first time it had happened since the funeral. Though I did look it up in the encyclopedia, and found this mental state listed as "self-accusation" under the heading "Acute Melancholia." Here I also found the cause of it, "sudden and horrible shock" and "deaths of those who are near and dear." And still I did not stop this sort of self-torture. I continued to stare stupidly through the dark glasses at the swarming traffic. Then I spoke up again, moving my lips slightly, yet not parting them. No one paid me any particular attention, though if anyone had been watching he might have thought I was either sick or crazy. But perhaps at that particular moment I was both sick and crazy.

"I wasn't always so tender and soft-spoken to you, was I?" I asked.

"Yes, you were."

"Tell the truth."

"Well . . . You haven't always been."

"I was too loud. I was nervous. I was impatient. I was irritable."

"Oh, no."

"Tell the truth."

"Well . . . You were loud."

"And nervous."

"That, too."

"Irritable."

"That, too. But I never minded. I was sorry for you. I often told Lili so. She knows. And since I died she has told you often."

I replied: "I didn't believe her. I thought Lili was just trying to ease my mind. But now that you say it I believe it. I believe it now because it assuages my grief."

Then she said, "Why was I sorry for you? Because perhaps no one except me knows that inwardly you were broken to pieces. I always told myself, 'What a pity he's so nervous, because we could get along so nicely, two broken human beings.' I told Lili so."

"Why didn't you tell me, too?"

"I didn't want you to know I knew you were broken. I saw years ago that you didn't want anyone to notice it in you."

"But if you'd told me all this honestly and word for word, it would have brought us closer together, and I should have been more comforted and calmer."

"If you had . . ." she said, "If you'd said . . . 'If . . . 'would . . . ' Merciful heavens, how much we kept from each other that we should have told!"



"Kept from each other." "We should have told."

Those words reminded me that when we were in Nice we used to take more than half an hour's walk to the Restaurant Reynaud, where we generally had lunch. She usually hummed softly all the way as she walked beside me. At such moments I never spoke to her, for fear of

interrupting the soft humming. I always regarded this un-self-conscious humming as a sign of the relaxation of a balanced and contented soul. So I would say nothing, because I preferred hearing the soft humming of this woman, parted from her family, exiled, homeless on my account (which always weighed on my conscience), to any assurance of hers that she was feeling fine. For these assurances were perhaps—for reasons of considerateness—not always truthful. The humming was always truthful.



"We often went without talking," she said, "when I was alive and we were together."

"It was so natural then," I said, "and yet now I do miss terribly all those conversations that we might have filled the silences with."

"I never told you how sorry I was for you. But I was always sorriest for you when you thought you had hurt me."

"Did you realize I would always regret the least little nervous word the very next moment?"

"I knew that no matter whatever nervous things you said to me hurt you, not me. I knew your disease was to wound yourself as often as you could. I knew, because there are other people like that among your friends. It's because they're like you: persecuted, homeless, and unhappy."

After this I went on standing on the street corner for a long time, with closed eyes, thinking of nothing, as it were with my mind a blank. Then I asked her, "Do you

know where your cheap little hat is that those two strange women in the restaurant liked so much?"

"I know. It's aboard a ship on the Atlantic. It's traveling in a big box along with my other things to 'my dear ones.' My sisters."

"You'd have liked to go and see them next spring."

"Very much."

"Now it's you that's crying."

"No. The wind's blowing. That's why I put on my glasses."

"Aren't your eyes weeping behind the glass?"

"Not any more."

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Although I feel it is superfluous by now, still I cannot help pointing out that in all these conversations my imagination welded together the things she said out of what I thought she would have said when alive, though actually she was too considerate to do so; out of what she had said or written to others; out of what she had said to me; and particularly out of what I would have liked her to say to me, either during her life or now that I was conversing with her in morbid dreams.

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This mute dialogue on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42d Street had an odd ending. As I stood motionless on the curb, facing Fifth Avenue, thinking with closed eyes behind my dark glasses, I felt someone gently taking me

by the arm. It was a stranger, a tall young man. He asked as he held my arm:

"Do you want to get across the street?"

He thought I was blind.

"Thank you, no," I said, looking up at him. He saw the glint of my eyes behind my dark glassees; then he let go of my arm, and smiled. "Sorry," he said, embarrassed, and hurried on.

And I went home.



"Home" meant to my hotel. It has three entrances, on three different streets. Our entrance gave upon "our street," Fifty-eighth. I cannot refrain from putting down a few facts about the little piece of Fifty-eighth that I call "our street," facts connected with Wanda's daily life. A person who was writing a book entitled *History of the United States* would find no material in the following lines. Nor would he if he were writing a *History of the City of New York*. To no one except me have these facts any significance. And still I cannot help gathering them here.

Our street—or rather *her* street—is very short. It is the section of West Fifty-eighth between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, from one corner to the next. One block. If we enter it from Fifth Avenue, going toward Sixth, there are altogether nine buildings on the right hand side. On the left, where several old, narrow-fronted houses survive, there are twenty. It is a commonplace New York side street, yet it has a certain something that reminds one of old-fashioned Paris beyond the Académie on the Left

Bank. (Or was it just something that we two fancied?) It has several large modern buildings, but more are small and old. Small shops, small restaurants, small laundries, small grocery stores. On cloudy October days, when the first cold autumn gusts come, thousands of dry, withered, yellow leaves from Central Park go rustling through this comparatively quiet, short street. They race against traffic. They do not obey the regulation prescribing one-way traffic from west to east. The leaves rush from east to west, because the wind from the neighboring Plaza Circle, next the park, blows them through. A week or two later there are no hurrying leaves left in our street. You can really call them gone with the wind.

I call this little section Wanda's street because you might say that she lived her daily life in the buildings there. I passed several thousand times with Wanda along the sidewalks on both sides; here I saw her go shopping, sometimes even limping on crutches. When I walk through the street now, almost every building has a memory connecting me with Wanda—and I still go through it several times a day. No, I am not writing material for historians or biographers, interested even in where the great personality lived, shopped, or dined. I am trying to record unemotionally what bound Wanda to these buildings. It will be a commonplace record. But from childhood and throughout my whole long career I have been trained to hold the printed word in awe; the superstition (nothing unusual in a writer) that a printed book is something permanent merely because it is a book has become part of my flesh and blood. After all, palaces intended to defy the centuries have been built for the

storage of books. This is one of the reasons why, as I count up these trifles about Wanda's street for the purpose of a book, I feel as if I were thereby picking out her brief, young, and suddenly withered life from among the hundreds of thousands of hurrying leaves, fallen and swept away through this street. I feel as if I were prolonging the memory of her life, which, after all, will eventually be blown away along with my own leaf existence away from the street and away from the world.

As we enter this short street from the east, heading west, the first of the nine buildings on the right is the Hotel Plaza, where she lived more than seven years, and where she died. A few paces further, in the same building, is her pharmacy, where she sat so often, so long, so patiently until my prescriptions were ready. ("Why don't you come on back, and let them send it up when it's ready?" . . . "They do it faster if I sit there.")

In the second building lives Dr. Lowrie, whom she pulled out of bed the night I was ill, kindly Dr. Lowrie, who became our friend afterward, and whom Wanda awakened in the middle of the night again when I was sick in bed and my night nurse, dozing in an armchair, had an unexpected heart attack and needed quick first aid before she went by ambulance to the hospital.

In front of the third house we would often pause during the first few years, toying with the idea of buying the little brownstone building. Counting the windows from outside, we divided up the house into apartments. George Ruttkay and our friend B. could have bachelor quarters there, too. Of course we never bought the house. But even years later we never gave up standing nostal

gically outside, day-dreaming of a little house where we could live with our friends. ("Four stories," she said, "one for you, one for Lili, one for me and for my office, and one, divided in halves, for the two bachelors.")

She often went into the fourth building, taking my clothes to the tailor. ("If you must be stubborn and insist on taking my clothes down yourself, do at least wrap them up in paper!" . . . "I'm not ashamed to carry gentlemen's suits over my arm even without paper; I wasn't ashamed either when John Gielgud or Gene Tierney rode down with me in the elevator, and stared and stared to see a lady with a man's pants over her arm. Anyone that doesn't like it can look the other way.")

In the fifth building was the hairdresser, of whom she used to remark as we passed, "My hairdresser." (This was not true; it was the hairdresser to whom she did not go, in order to save her hairdressing money for the coconuts, rice, and vitamin pills she kept secretly sending to her sister's children.)

To enter the sixth building you went down some stairs into the basement: this was her pastry shop. When afternoon guests appeared unexpectedly, she would vanish unnoticed. I knew she was running over, and would be back in a few minutes with a lot of pastry. ("The New Yorkers ought to learn the nice Hungarian custom: at a certain time of day you must offer your guest not only something to drink, but something solid to eat.")

In the seventh building is a small restaurant, which used to serve southern cooking, and is now Italian. (If I had the patience to count up, even hastily, the amount of t

we spent during those fifteen years on two continents in little restaurants and sidewalk cafés—often absorbed in writing or reading—, I verily believe our café time would add up to five full years.) In the big window of the restaurant stands a single table. (“We’ll eat here regularly,” she said, “at that nice table, where you can look out on the street. And if any of our friends pass by, they’ll see us and come in and join us.”) We went in and ate a few times at that table during the southern period of the establishment, and also in its Italian period. We looked expectantly out of the window, but none of our friends ever went by.

On the eighth piece of ground there was no building in her lifetime. It was a parking lot. Every time we went past, she would take my arm as if I had been blind, and would lead me past the open gate, through which cars would speed recklessly across the sidewalk without sounding their horns. (“Why do you grab my arm? I’m not blind.” . . . “Worse,” she said, “you’re absent-minded.”)

The ninth building is the last on that side, the corner building on Sixth Avenue. In it is the drugstore where they once bandaged her injured elbow. (“There,” she told me, “lives Oscar Karlweis, the Viennese actor; I see him often, but I’ve never seen him smile yet, even though he is such a wonderful comedian.”) And in that building, too, is the Barbizon Delicatessen, where we often took supper, the two of us alone or with friends. That was where we first saw those great names in New York radio, Walter Winchell and Norman Corwin. Behind the counter of the delicatessen is a clerk named Herman

Laster. He was an Austrian subject, and after the first World War a prisoner in Russia. He speaks five languages a kind-hearted man whom Wanda considered one of her friends, and who used to provide her during the most difficult times with delicacies almost impossible to obtain. She would pack them up the very same night, and send them to her dear ones in Budapest, Vienna, and London. ("If it weren't for Herman, my sisters' children would go hungry.")

Now we will go over to the other side of the narrow Fifty-eighth Street, to the corner of Sixth Avenue, and we will walk back from Sixth Avenue toward Fifth, from west to east. (When we were walking together in that direction, she used to point east and say, "Yonder is the sidewalk cafe of the Welcome Hotel . . . in France . . . in Villefranche . . . close by the mole where the warships anchor . . . and the quiet railway station at Beaulieu-sur-Mer . . . and even further, the Piazza San Marco in Venice . . . with the thousands of little iron tables . . . and if I close my eyes I can even see the four bronze horses over the portal of St. Mark's Church . . .")

The first building on this side is the Park Chambers Hotel. Here is her florist, from whose shop she sent so many flowers to our women friends, often putting not her own name but mine on the card. Here she used to buy a tiny bouquet every day. ("For the gallery of my dear ones.") The gallery consisted of some snapshots in little frames, put up wherever she lived so that she could see them from bed as she fell asleep or awoke. ("I give them the first and the last look of the day.") The pictures were of her murdered brother Michael, her two sisters,

Helen and Martha, their children, and the grandchildren of the elder sister. Even when she was invited to the country for a weekend she would take "my dear ones' gallery" along and set it up in the same way; she would get up at seven in the morning to pick fresh wild flowers for the "gallery" because there was no florist.

In that same corner building at Fifty-eighth Street and Sixth Avenue we used to lunch in the quiet dining-room during the last years. The bar is outside the dining-room. Here Wanda would wait for me at noon until I got back from my constitutional in Central Park. Usually my 'constitutional" consisted of sitting on a crowded bench among noisy babies, nurses, and young mothers, rewriting in small notebooks the German version of my 1931 play, *Somebody*.

When I would rejoin Wanda after one of these constitutionals, I would find three people huddled together at the end of the bar, still empty so early in the day: Wanda, the old silver-haired Greek bartender, and an engineer whom Louis Bromfield introduced and spoke very highly of, who was a dwarf. This trio would converse there in an undertone every day until I arrived. "What do you three keep talking about so constantly, day after day?" . . . "The *smaller* problems of the world.")

Like the silver-haired bartender, who used to give her cocktail and a half and sometimes two for the price of one, our waiter, Costa, was "a friend of hers." Costa was helpful, perpetually smiling little Greek, about to go home to Greece for good. On the map of the Mediterranean he showed us one of the Greek islands, no bigger

than a full stop in the newspaper, saying that his family were awaiting him there after his ten years of hard work in New York, and now he was going back as a "rich American relative." (From the day when Costa discovered the bartender was giving Wanda a glass and a half instead of one, he would bring her a serving and a half whenever a favorite dish of hers was on the menu.)

Next to our accustomed table, a lady and gentleman, whom to this day I know nothing of, used to lunch day after day at a table for two. They were the subject of Wanda's constant observation and delight. ("See how gently and thoughtfully and considerately the two always talk to each other, even after years!") She liked this pair of strangers so well that the day after the funeral I had the manager send roses to the lady, whom I still do not know, in remembrance of Wanda's esteem.

This is a rough cross-section of our New York "social life," which went on among these simple, quiet people, the way we liked it to be; now and then we went to see friends but we never accepted invitations to festive Park Avenue parties or fashionable night-clubs.

In the second building is a dressmaker, likewise a stranger to me, who made the few clothes that Wanda needed. After her death the dressmaker said to a woman friend that she had never had such a gentle customer as Wanda, and never would again. "She was never," she said, "either impatient, dissatisfied, or critical, and she was the only one like that."

In the fourth building is one of "her" grocers, who used to deliver fruit to her when she was sick in bed, because "her" other grocers had no help to make deliveries.

In the fifth building, now a new restaurant, was our dearly beloved, simple, unpretentious *Mona Lisa*, where we went for years, until it ceased to exist. Here the humble denizens of our street once attended the wedding banquet for the daughter of one of the waiters. The beaming old Italian waiter brought Wanda over a piece of his daughter's wedding cake from the big party, as they feasted and sang at a long table. Wanda was proud of being the only one in the crowded restaurant to enjoy this distinction.

The seventh building is the Wyndham Hotel. In it is "her" antique jewelry shop; she knew all of the inexpensive but tasteful little things in its show window well, seldom omitting to study them over and over again. I too know them all: the silver lizard pin, the gold oak leaf, the gold shamrock with tiny green stones, the silver-and-mother-of-pearl flower, the pink rock-crystal necklace, the nine-pointed white-gold crowns, the jade earrings, the gold-and-turquoise dragon brooch, the gold-and-garnet butterfly clasp, the miniature portraits in oval diamond-chip frames, the tiny gold dagger with the pearl studded hilt, and many, many other treasures rings, bracelets, clasps, brooches, pins, earrings, necklaces, all in gold, silver, platinum, with big topazes and amethysts and tiny diamonds and even tinier pearls. ("This is my Cartier, Van Cleef, Arpels, and Tiffany, all in one.")

At this hotel we used to visit Marcel Vertès, the Hungarian artist, and his wife. For a long time the Viennese author Ernst Lothar lived there with his wife, the Viennese and subsequently Broadway actress Adrienne Gessner; we had spent many an excited Viennese first night

in their congenial company. We often met both of them in our street, or at the grocer's or in the restaurant; they spent much of their time, as we did, in this one block. One morning we set out to call on them because a family tragedy had come upon them suddenly. As we were about to telephone up from the lobby, Iothar came out of the elevator, seeing us, he was so much overcome by emotion that he only stroked our heads once, quickly, tenderly, and in his anguish hurried out upon the street without saying a word. Even long afterward Wanda would mention that brief, silent scene to me as a perfect expression of human suffering.

In front of this hotel Wanda used to meet Mady Christians, "beautiful and sweet," who lived there, and she would often see the celebrated Shakespearean actor Maurice Evans coming out, he also was briefly a guest. Wanda liked the hotel, and wanted to take rooms for us there, but could never get any.

On the same side of the block, in one of the other buildings, was her favorite grocer (four steps down into the basement), where a hold up took place in which a guest at our hotel was shot and severely wounded. In the ensuing days Wanda went right on shopping there, and never said a word about the matter to the grocer, by contrast with other ladies, who either stayed away or plagues the grocer for days with questions about the gory details.

In one of the adjoining buildings, too, was a favorite amusement of hers—sitting by the hour in the auction gallery, listening intently to what went on. ("Why do you keep on sitting there if you never buy anything?"

thing interests me more than lots of movies.”)

Also in one of these buildings, on the second floor, you often saw dancing couples of an evening inside the big, open windows. There were bright lights and phonograph music; it must have been a dancing-school. She would make me stand for fifteen or twenty minutes on the other side of the street, watching the dance. (“It’s all the same to me—theater, movies, tennis tournament, auction, or dancing-school—as long as it’s a show!”)

In the next building is a dress shop whose proprietor, a woman, burst into hysterical tears when my wife told her of Wanda’s death. A day before her death Wanda took her dresses there to be altered.

One of the buildings was not yet built in her lifetime; work on the foundations was still going on, so that you could see across the vacant lot from Fifty-eighth Street to Fifty-seventh. Often I would wait for Wanda on the Fifty-seventh Street side of the lot, and she would wave to me from Fifty-eighth as she came out of the hotel. Since then a big office building has been put up there. The memory of a friendly hand waving is buried under fourteen stories of heavy steel and concrete.

And I have purposely left until last among these buildings the house at Number 40, which is the funeral home where, after Wanda was brought from the morgue, they combed her hair, dressed her in her favorite frock, and put her with folded hands into a coffin; the house where she slept one night among flowers, and where most of the above-mentioned people of “our street,” the waiters, grocers, elevator men and bellboys from three hotels, the

tailor, the florist, the dry-cleaner, the pastry cook, kind old Herman, the delicatessen waitresses, construction workers from the vacant lot, the clerks from the two drug-stores, the auctioneer, the seamstresses from one of the dressmakers, and even perfect strangers off the street, paid their respects to her as she lay in state. Since it was August, only a few of our other friends were in New York. And from this house in our street we hurtled off in such haste to the cemetery on August 30, 1947.

All this is still no sufficient explanation for my describing this inconsequential street in such meaningless detail. But it may perhaps explain why I really ought to move away from the street and live elsewhere, and why I cannot do it.

CHAPTER 10

Here is something that I am certainly not the first to experience; others will find it in some form among their memories. I have been left alone in possession of a language: a home-made jargon that only we two spoke and understood, Wanda and I and no one else in the world. When we were alone together we always spoke Hungarian. And since we were alone together a great deal, always in countries where a foreign language was spoken, we developed our own special idiom, not even altogether Hungarian. An argot, slang. We had terms of our own making for household articles, garments, food, drinks, we had our private descriptive adjectives for weather, situations, and states of mind. We had our own one-word characterization for strangers, unintelligible to others—a whole special little

language. I have tried above to translate two terms from this language: the one that literally meant "stranger-acquaintance" I translated as "friend by sight"; the other, the warm scarf, I translated with the French-English compound "Bisc muffler." In the course of the years this language developed into a thieves' latin, or what might be called a spies' cant, or something like the language written nowadays by people in countries where the mail is censored. Our Hungarian countrymen often goggled when we forgot ourselves and spoke a few words of our private language in their presence. But we enjoyed having a language of our own, and continued to develop it of set purpose. In the end we had more than a hundred words. We could say whole sentences that no one could understand.



After one of these philological displays, I told her the old story from Hungarian folklore, about the rich peasant, his son, and the French language-master. (Funny though the story is, it has a bitter taste as I write it down now.) As the story goes, the rich but stupid *parvenu* took it into his head that his son must learn French. He spread the word that he was looking for someone to teach his son the language. The tutor was to have free lodging, good food, and a handsome salary until the boy could speak perfect French.

This came to the ears of a penniless, ragged young man who was almost starving to death; though he could not speak a word of French, he applied to the rich peasant as

a French tutor. The peasant took the "tutor" into his house, and that very day, after a substantial meal, the teacher and the boy sat down together to study French. He was closeted with the boy for hours every day, teaching him; in his desperation he invented a new language. For instance he would coin a word, and assert that it was the French for "table". Or he would fling together a meaningless collection of syllables and declare it was the French word for "door". And so on.

The story goes on to say that at length the boy and the teacher spoke this "French" fluently, even conversing merrily at the dinner table while the family listened to them in awed but proud silence. The end of the story was that the tutor fell sick and died. The boy went to Paris, and only then did he discover that he spoke a language no one in the world but himself could understand.

In somewhat the same way I have been left behind with a secret language consisting of a hundred-odd words, silly, perhaps, but to me forever dear. I am the only person in the whole world who understands it now.



And I have been left alone with many little incidents of which there was no witness except us two. We often recalled these, always prefacing them with the question, "Remember?" and I always ending them by saying, "Remind me some time to make a note of that . . . for my memoirs." Now I have no partner to say, "Yes, I was there too."

"Remember the scare about the waitress in San Remo?"

Opposite the railroad station was a little restaurant, the *Ristorante Dei Viaggiatori*. We often went there on gloomy winter afternoons. We were already out of sorts from the constant bad news of the world, and on account of the racial hatred that was beginning to take root even then among the good-hearted Italians. I bought a detective story at the railway book-stall, and we sat down in a corner of the ill-lit bistro. Wanda was in the habit of eating a bowl of real Italian minestrone before her dinner at the hotel, and I, reading, would drink half a liter of *dolce aqua* (sweet water), as the local red wine was called. This early in the evening no one besides us would be in the place. The proprietor, who usually dozed behind the bar, was not there either. Anita, the waitress, was a friend of ours. That day, as usual, she brought Wanda her soup and me my wine, with a smile. She put the plate and the bottle on the table. Then she screamed, clutched at us, and collapsed on a chair beside us. She began screaming horribly, and tried to get up from the chair. I took her around the waist to keep her from falling to the floor. We two were the only witnesses of the scene.

Anita bore a child. A second later the proprietor rushed in with his wife and son. They carried Anita back into a dark corner; the boy telephoned to the hospital.

"Remember the scare about the waitress in San Remo?"



"Remember Chiarelli's laurels?"

It was also in San Remo that we saw a great deal of Luigi Chiarelli, the Italian playwright, and his wife, who

were both very nice to us. I was particularly grateful to them because they "discovered" the taciturn and unassuming Wanda and really made a pet of her. One evening Chiarelli's newest play had its opening at the little theater of the San Remo Casino. That afternoon we went to our favorite florist's—the shop belonged to a very young married couple—and had a huge bouquet of a hundred red carnations made for the playwright. After paying for the carnations, I asked the young florist to bind up a big laurel branch with the bouquet.

"A laurel branch?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes," I said, "laurel, because it's to be presented this evening to Luigi Chiarelli, the poet, at the theater."

The florist said, "We have no laurel here, but there are some big bushes in our garden at home." He glanced at a little, shriveled old man sitting hunched in a corner. "Grandpa," he told him, "hurry up and bring a great big laurel branch from home!"

Grandpa sprang briskly to his feet, jumped on a bicycle, and was gone. "Take a seat," said the florist. "You'll have your laurel in a minute."

We sat down. Within a few minutes Grandpa came back with a gigantic laurel branch. This they wound around the carnation bouquet. They said, "It'll be at the theater this evening. Signor Chiarelli shall have it punctually."

"How much?" I asked, pointing to the laurel. I reached in my pocket.

Grandpa answered: "Laurels given to a poet by another poet can't possibly cost anything."

We thanked them kindly, and left. We agreed that the

nicest part of it all was the words "can't possibly." Even before this both of us had loved the simple people of Italy.

"Remember Chiarelli's laurels?"



"Remember when Ley kissed the yellow-haired woman in the dark?"

That was in San Remo too. (We spent part of the winter there for years.) Some of the guests at our hotel used to dance after dinner. By that time Hitler's friends were wintering there. They were arrogant, and the people of San Remo loathed them (as Italians have always loathed them in my lifetime), but were afraid of them.

In the dining-room of our hotel, near our table for two, was a round corner table for twelve. It was the "main table," where the management always placed the greatest celebrities who were staying at the hotel. Here Wanda often observed our "friend by sight" King Alphonso XIII of Spain with his elderly Spanish lady émigré guests—or another time the Italian General Badoglio (who became Premier of Italy after the war), who was staying with his family at San Remo because one of his daughters was being married there.

As time went on, though, it was not such pleasant people as these who sat at the main table, but a Nazi named Robert Ley, with his large, noisy party. He was an intimate personal friend of Hitler's, a cabinet minister, labor leader, and one of the loudest-mouthed agitators in Hitler's government. He was a fat little man, and often looked

across at us from the big table with piercing, baleful eyes. (Or did we only imagine it?) A woman with dyed yellow hair (perhaps his wife?) was in the big Nazi party every evening, giggling incessantly. The dancing used to go on to the music of a jazz band in the bar next to the dining room. We generally watched the merrymaking of the triumphant Nazis from a corner of the reading-room, which by that time of night was dark and empty. "His Excellency" Ley, the celebrated orator, temperance preacher, and moralist, used to drink a huge bottle of heavy Capri wine, and then, despite his shapeless body and short legs, he would dance, with the agility and fancy figures of a suburban Paris gigolo, with the yellow-haired woman, pawing her as he did so. Once he danced her into the dark reading-room, close to the dark corner from which we were peeping out at the jolly Nazis.

We were scared to death. But His Excellency never noticed us at all. After a brief struggle he pressed a long kiss to the lips of the yellow-haired woman. She lightly slapped his face, and His Excellency, laughing, danced her back into the bar. No one saw it except the two of us. Immediately after the war Ley committed suicide. We saw it in the papers in New York.

"Remember when Ley kissed the yellow-haired woman in the dark?"



In the spring of 1939, the year the war broke out, we were in Paris to pick up my *Carte d'Identité*, the *permis de séjour* for three years, which I had been fighting more

than a year to get, assisted by my dear French dramatist friends Edouard Bourdet and Tristan Bernard and the authoritative critic Fortunat Strowski. One morning I went to Police Headquarters to pick up these documents, then so vital to a refugee; the deputy police commissioner was extremely nice to me, and gave me the papers, saying, "France is happy to offer refuge to people like you."

That evening Wanda and I, relieved at last after the long and nerve-racking struggle for the vital papers, were sitting at a sidewalk table of the Café Wetzel next to the Opera, before the performance. We watched the smart cars driving up to the Opera one after another, while more and more glamorous ladies and fashionable gentlemen got out. A ragged old beggar, passing in front of the café, picked up one of the discarded cigarette butts from the sidewalk. As ill luck would have it, a policeman was close behind him. He rapped the man on the head from behind with his white truncheon, and gave him such a kick in the seat that the old man fell down on all fours. When he got up, he asked the policeman, "What for? Can't a person pick up the cigarette butts that others have spat out?"

The policeman pointed to the brilliant throng entering the Opera. "Yes, but not in front of all these swell tourists!" We watched and listened in horror. Besides us, there were two men reading newspapers in the sidewalk cafe. They did not even look up.

At noon the next day we set off for Geneva. As we sat in the speeding train, Wanda suddenly spoke. "You should have stepped in last night before that cop knocked down the old beggar."

We had just left Bellegarde; the train was already on Swiss soil, having just crossed the frontier.

"Step in? I?" I asked.

"Yes, you."

"How do you mean, step in? How could I do that?"

"By grabbing the cop's arm and taking his number. The only reason I didn't do it myself was because I'm a woman."

"That would have been silly," I said. "We're hated foreigners in Paris."

"Hated? You? Wearing the Legion of Honor ribbon? You? After you boasted how nice the deputy police commissioner was to you?"

I was embarrassed by this. I said, "Why didn't you say so then and there if you're such a fiery champion of justice? Why not until now, when we're in Switzerland?"

"Because it can't get you into any more trouble now," she said. "But I had to get it off my chest. Now it's off."



One of our hang-outs in Venice, where we spent part of every year, was the Café Lavena on the Piazza San Marco. One day we were sitting there with one of my Hungarian fellow-writers. The conversation turned to a Budapest newspaperman, a notoriously corrupt, vicious, and frightening fellow, who had often abused both me and my friend in print. We writers were both angry with him, but we fancied ourselves in the parts of chivalrous opponents, putting on a "free-press-above-all" act. The air was thick with such expressions as "merciless but

gifted," "a ruthless genius," and so on. Wanda said nothing.

When she and I were on our way home, she said, "How could you speak so well of such a terrible person?"

I said nothing, because I felt that she was right.

"You spoke well of the man," she said, "because each of you was sure the other would run to him with the story."

Once more I said nothing, because she was right again. Since then it has happened more than once that people—mostly theater people—have spoken highly of someone to me; and I have never been able to get rid of the suspicion that the praise was only because the person thought I would run with the story to the subject of the conversation, or was even actually intending to use me as a mailbox to transmit the encomium. Once when one of these people had just left, Wanda said, "What a thrifty man! He didn't even stick a three-cent-stamp on your face!"



We had lunch with a well-known American actress at the Restaurant Caramello near the harbor of the French village of St. Jean-Cap-Ferrat. (Whenever we were on Cap Ferrat peninsula, we would go by Wanda's request to look at the house of one of our favorite authors, Somerset Maugham. We hoped we might perhaps chance to see him in person. We went year after year, and never once contrived to see him. Then later, there was a time when we saw him every day in the elevator at the Plaza Hotel in New York.)

While the three of us were at lunch the great American actress began roundly abusing a well-known New York producer, a friend of mine. Embarrassed and stammering, I tried to defend him. Thereupon the actress damned him worse than ever, even using language quite unbecoming to a lady. Wanda spoke up, contrary to her habit. She said quite sharply to the actress, "I presume you don't know that this gentleman is one of Mr. Molnar's best friends."

The actress shrugged. She said, "That doesn't change my opinion of him." We soon finished lunch, and the actress boarded the bus for Monte Carlo, while we went home to Cannes. We have not seen the actress since. A few years later the producer came to call on me here in New York. He not only spoke well of the actress, but praised her to the skies. In spite of herself, Wanda's face showed the barest hint of a smile. But the producer's eye caught it. "What's the matter?" he asked her. "Don't you agree with me?"

"Oh, of course, of course," said Wanda, startled. Then, after the producer had gone: "Remember the lunch at St. Jean-Cap-Ferrat?"



In San Remo there is a positively monumental gambling casino, with a very pretty intimate theater. Traveling Italian troupes take turns playing there. One day we were surprised to see posters on the streets announcing, along with another play, a one-act drama of mine entitled *Marshal*, with Memo Benassi, already mentioned, in the

leading part. Wanda rushed to the theater, and bought us two seats in the back row. But it was no use our hiding in the rear. Benassi's spies spotted me at the theater that evening. After the customary noise, excitement, and high-flown speeches from the stage, we were invited to a midnight supper by the director of the casino, Signor Porcheddu, and his wife, a very agreeable young couple. The big table was set for fifteen or twenty in a corner of the main hall of the casino. The golden necks of champagne bottles gleamed above silver buckets. All around us at table, gentlemen and ladies whom we did not know were talking in four different languages.

Next to me was a distinguished lady (a member, someone whispered to me, of the highest London aristocracy), whose name I have never learned to this day. Opposite her sat Wanda. The talk was of King Edward VIII, who had recently abdicated. Wanda admired Edward VIII (as I believe all really feminine women the world over did at the time) for what he had done; she had been touched by the speech she heard over the radio in which the king had abdicated for "the woman I love." My elderly English neighbor smiled sarcastically. Wanda looked inquiringly at me. I asked the lady very softly, "Did the speech have any effect in England?"

"Yes, it had," she said. "A bad effect."

We were taken aback. "Why?" Wanda asked. "I liked the speech a lot."

"We didn't like it," said the lady. "We English are annoyed with the gentleman."

We had heard before about this feeling in England. I

signaled to Wanda with my eyes to drop the subject. So indeed she did; but not the British lady.

"Do you know why we're annoyed?" she said, turning to me.

"Why?" asked Wanda, almost scared for fear she should hear something derogatory to the man she admired.

The British lady frowned angrily. As if betraying a great secret—(in the old days they would have said, "hissing like a serpent")—she whispered to Wanda, "Do you know what an unheard-of-thing that man was going to do once he was king?"

"N-no," Wanda stammered.

The lady leaned across the table, and hissed red-faced as if not the king but Wanda had done something wicked, "Well, if you must know, that man wanted to rule England! To rule! Preposterous . . . a King of England, wanting to rule!"



This used to belong to us both, now it belongs to me alone—the following microscopic little story. But I am an eager, nay a bigoted collector of precisely these, our infinitesimal memories. The tinier the event and the less it deserves that name, the more attached to it I am. The idea will not be beaten out of my head that the tiniest and most private, but human, happening is more durable than the earth-shaking military feats of Genghis Khan, Attila, Napoleon, even Hitler. Myself I have always been far more interested in God's thumbnail sketches than in His heroicized historical paintings. I am quite aware that this is one

of my major failings as a writer, nothing to be proud of, rather to be apologized for at every opportunity.

In spite of her simplicity and soft-spokenness, Wanda was quite aware of the spell she cast, though she never spoke of it. Just once she betrayed to me that she realized her magnetism upon strangers. As I say, the matter is really a less than microscopic trifle. But nevertheless I cannot get it out of my head. One evening we came home for dinner about nine, and went up together in the hotel elevator. The late papers, the *News* and *Mirror*, were not to be had at our newsstand outside. There were big piles of both in the elevator. I took a *News* and a *Mirror* from the pile, and gave a quarter to our friend the elderly elevator man. (He has since died.)

When we got out of the elevator, Wanda asked me, "Why did you pay twenty-five cents for two two-cent papers?"

(I was going to give him twenty cents, but I didn't have two dimes. So I was five cents more generous than I intended.)

"It's late," I said, "and it's raining, and they went out to get those papers somewhere where they could buy them earlier. It may have been a long way off; they may have gone to the newspaper plant. They've opened a newsstand in the elevator. . . . They'd like to make a few cents."

"But twenty-five cents was too much. This isn't the only time you've given either too little or too much. You have no instinct for tipping. This time, for instance, twice five instead of twice two would have been plenty."

"But twenty-five can't have been too much," I said. "The old man didn't even thank me."

The same thing happened the next day, and the day after. Two papers, a quarter and a friendly smile from me, no "thank you."

"Do you know what?" she said some days later, "I'll start buying the papers. Give me ten cents."

I gave her ten cents. She pulled out the two papers from the pile exactly as I had been doing, looked at the old elevator man, and without the slightest trace of a feminine smile, without a shadow of the wiles with which most women try to make their shopping cheaper—expressly showing me that she was not resorting to methods beyond my reach—gave him the dime.

"Thanks a lot," said the old man warmly and loudly.



And what comes next is even slighter than what went before. Possibly it is downright silly of me to write it at all.

In my neighborhood, where I have been in the habit of taking an hour's walk every morning under doctor's orders, is a lingerie shop. Its specialty, at least in my eyes, was a tremendous display of handsome lace handkerchiefs, handkerchiefs not with the usual initials, but with embroidered Christian names written out in longhand. They had not only the ordinary names like Mary, Catherine, and Dorothy, but the less common ones, such as Priscilla, Honoria, Cynthia, and Lucinda. So one day I went in and asked if they happened to have a handkerchief with the name Wanda. I meant it for a surprise. These little unexpected attentions always pleased her more than anything else.

The salesgirl looked through a great heap of them, in vain. There was no "Wanda."

"And I'd have taken a dozen," I said. "Couldn't you order them?"

"We're getting a new shipment with all kinds of names next week. Won't you drop in then?"

I dropped in the following week. The new shipment had not yet arrived. "Couldn't you send a special order?" I tried again.

The proprietor came over. "We'll write," he said. "You shall have it. Next week or the week after."

"I'll buy two dozen," I said by way of encouragement.

Neither that week nor the week after did they have any. "We'll write again," the proprietor assured me.

Two months or more passed in this way. Naturally Wanda knew nothing about my campaign. We went away for a summer holiday. When we got home, toward the end of August, 1947, I dropped in again.

"Remember? Two dozen handkerchiefs? With *Wanda* on them?"

"Yes," said the proprietor. "We wrote. We ordered them, but they still haven't sent any. But maybe if you're around here next week. . . ."

I was around again the following week, but this time I had no reason to go in after the handkerchiefs. Very likely they had arrived by then, and were waiting in the shop. But after what I have already said, it is much more likely that they had not. She will never know how hard I worked for those handkerchiefs. The surprise didn't come off. That's another memory I'm left alone with. The perfectly silly, but human, idea still troubles me sometimes

that it was a mistake not to tell her I was expecting the handkerchiefs: I shouldn't have kept it for a surprise. My passing thought would have pleased her even without the handkerchiefs. She wouldn't have enjoyed it so much as an actual surprise present, but still she would have enjoyed it. What good does it do me now not to have told her?



And here is the story of the cabbage. Even less significant, if that be possible, than any of the foregoing "trifles light as air," as *Othello* has it. We often went to dinner at the Barbizon Delicatessen on Sixth Avenue. We were sitting in the corner one evening, and had just given our orders to our nice waiter, Abe. I ordered boiled beef with plain spinach. Abe wrote down the order, and went off toward the kitchen. I began mechanically studying the bill of fare, like any nervous fool who does not really read the menu until he has given the order. One item was Corned Beef and Cabbage.

"Oh," I said, "they've got cabbage."

Wanda instantly jumped up and darted after the waiter. Short of the kitchen door, as she reached the wooden partition of the last booth, she collided with four not altogether sober United States Marines, who, plainly by accident, knocked her aside so violently that the partition rang. But she overtook the waiter before he could order spinach from the kitchen. Then I saw her head bob into view again in the crowded little restaurant. She was smiling; she motioned that she would be right back. Springing

up, I saw her run out of the restaurant; from the door I saw her ducking into the adjoining drugstore. She was back in a minute. Her elbow was painted with iodine and dressed with several adhesive bandages. Her face was pale. Her handkerchief, which she was clutching in her trembling, bony fingers, which had also been hurt, was stained with blood. We resumed our corner seats in silence. I simply did not know what to say to her. Abe brought the plates with the food. With my boiled beef was cabbage. Not spinach. Cabbage. We ate and said nothing. I was nervous, and a little upset.

"For God's sake," I said at last, "why did you make such a blind rush after the waiter?"

"You asked for cabbage," she said softly.

"I didn't ask for it," I said, almost reproachfully. "All I said was, 'Oh, they've got cabbage.'"

"That's enough for me," she said quietly, spooning her soup.

A mere nothing, a trifle far lighter than air, isn't it? Carlyle wrote about the French Revolution, Mommsen and Ferrero wrote volumes about the greatness and decline of the Roman Empire, Moltke and Clausewitz wrote about warfare, the famous Henri de Jomini described all of Napoleon's battles in every detail, the Battle of Jena, the Battle of Austerlitz, even the Battle of Waterloo. . . . As a historian it has been my lot only to describe little Wanda's Battle of the Cabbage. An utter trifle, of course; yet whenever I think of that bony, bandaged elbow injured in the battle, the wounded thin arm and hand, now decaying beneath the damp and heavy soil, I find this trifle weighing heavier each time that it comes back to me.

I think what follows also belongs in this chapter. After I left my native country in 1923, it became a habit of mine to sit around by the hour, alone and wistful, at railroad stations in foreign countries. In the station restaurant, when there was one. If none, then on a bench near the tracks. I would watch the trains arriving, and specially leaving. The departing passengers interested me—particularly those whose friends on the platform kept waving after them for a long time. Wherever I was, I always envied the people who were going away. Fundamentally that was why I spent so many hours at stations instead of strolling in a park after work or listening to a dance band over afternoon tea at a café. It seemed that I was always longing to get away, from anywhere. Where to, I had no idea. Even now I don't know. Simply away from where I happened to be, wherever that was.

Ten years afterward Wanda caught the habit from me, and became very fond of this not altogether cheerful pastime. After that I no longer sat in stations alone. In the course of the years, the two of us spent an enormous amount of time at stations large and small, always watching the departing, the leave-takers.

The game was to observe a group of strangers preparing to take leave of one another; we would make ourselves acquainted, indeed almost intimate, with their faces; and then when the train started to move, we would first put ourselves in the places of the departing travelers whom we envied, and then immediately try to share the feelings of

those remaining, who kept waving after the dwindling train until it disappeared.

I think I can say that in our artificially created state of mind, which may now seem senseless and even silly, we too felt as if we were waving sympathetically to those who departed, for no other reason except that they were going.

If I were to take a pencil and add up even roughly the hours we spent in this contemplative and usually silent frequenting of stations, I should get a staggering total of weeks, months even. It was a typical, bitter, expatriate pastime.

Our observation post in Vienna was a window of the restaurant at the East Station. The attraction was a tiny artificial orange-tree about thirty inches high in a flower-pot on a table, with perhaps a hundred oranges wired on. We would often sit under this melancholy orange-tree.

In Paris it was the Gare de l'Est.

In Venice we had a table from which in one direction we could see the Grand Canal, in the other direction the trains of the great East-West Express, roaring from Asia by way of Venice, Turin, and Paris to be ferried across the English Channel to London. We envied the people who were going to London, as we did also those who took the train the other way, to Istanbul and Bagdad.

We sat in restaurant windows at the stations in Milan, Geneva, Lausanne, Nice, Cannes.

We had the tenancy of one of the two little iron tables that stood outdoors before the bar of the tiny station in Monte Carlo, facing the Mediterranean and underneath the iron tower of the diabolical elevator that rose beside

two tables, carrying the tourists direct from the station to the gambling casino on the hilltop.

We sat at just such little tables in Ospedaletti and Sanremo, where only the gleaming, sunlit rails ran between the table and the blue Mediterranean; here the Riviera Express, jammed with pleasure-seeking tourists, stopped for a moment, as it were to catch its breath, and then hurried on in its haste to reach the roulette tables, champagne bottles, oysters, and aging but still acceptable exotically dressed cocottes on the French seashore.

We sat a great deal on a bench at the French-Italian frontier station of Ventimiglia, where a crowd of people would jump off each train during the stop of a minute or so, and then clamber back aboard, each with a big bunch of carnations, particularly around Christmas. One of these bunches cost a few cents, and contained a hundred lovely carnations. That had been the specialty of this particular station ever since there had been any railroad there.

The only similar rush we watched was near Karlsbad, Pilsen, where white-coated boys dashed around with "genuine" Pilsner beer in glasses. There was more beer drunk here in two minutes than at any restaurant in an hour.

We often sat on the Karlsbad platform toward evening, when the Ostend Express left from right near our bench, to see the superb pigskin luggage of rich English people piled aboard and pompous old French waiters expertly set flower-decked tables in the dining-car.

To give a few more irresponsible statistics, I think

ninety-nine per cent of the time those who were leaving looked happier than those who stayed behind to wave.

O

All this I remember alone now. I alone remember the melancholy, pensive hours at the railway stations. And Anita the waitress at our table when she bore a child. And Hitler's friend the moralist cabinet minister who drunkenly kissed the yellow-haired woman, and had his face slapped for it. And the brutal gendarme in Paris. And the great actress on the Riviera calling down maledictions on the head of the great producer. And the elderly British lady who disapproved of King Edward VIII. The elevator man who was more pleased with a dime from her than with a quarter from me. And the probably embroidered and undelivered handkerchiefs with her name on them. And—cabbage. And the boyish-looking, consumptive young French would-be dramatist, whose name we never knew, but whom we could not shake off on our morning strolls at Nice, because he kept asking me one naive question after another about how to write successful comedies. And now I alone remember the behavior of the Hungarian chiropodist, who, hearing us speaking Hungarian on the street in Geneva, stopped us on the street, introduced himself as a fellow-countryman, presented his card, and thenceforth always greeted us with a low bow, but because we failed in our patriotic duty to have him remove our corns, not only gave up bowing but turned his head, and finally never allowed us to pass without spitting. And now, too, I am alone with the memory of the handsome young Venetian bartender, who, one night

when three of us—we two and a black-haired, uncommonly pretty and coquettish woman from Milan whom we did not know—the bartender, I say, who, after the woman left, complained to us *sotto voce* with tears in his eyes that the beauty not only never paid for her drinks, but had even extracted five thousand lire in cash from him by her coquetry and hints of favors, and had lost it all at roulette in the Casino at the Lido—without so much as letting him kiss her once. Now I am alone in remembering how one day in the Galleria Vittorio Emmanuele in Milan we recognized this same woman, pushing a baby-carriage with her baby, and how she turned and ran, pram and all, because she recognized us.

I am left alone with all these tragic and comic marionettes from our private international puppet show, and with many hundreds like them. Of many I cannot even say that I am “left alone” with them, because I have forgotten. In fact Wanda used to prompt most of these little anecdotes with a brief cue, even to recount them in my stead, since people at parties would expect me to entertain them with stories, and my memory would often go back on me. She had an apparently inexhaustible fund of these incidents that we had seen together, drawn from my well-tried but perpetually forgotten stock. Now I can only say, as I realize ever oftener and more painfully, that Wanda was my memory.



What follows, too, is a paragraph put together out of miniatures. Again such little things as I might, to be pom-

pous about it, call microphotographs. (I have long been afflicted with what the oculists call *macropsy*, what in my case might be described as spiritual macropsy—seeing small things bigger than they really are.)

I am left alone, too, with unpretentious objects she gave me. Not one of these did I ever ask or suggest that she get for me. It was always her own idea that these things would help or be useful to me. And to me they were always surprises, because she never said a word about any of them beforehand. Nor did she ever *present* them to me, not solemnly, simply, or casually. She wanted to avoid even the mildest forms of thanks. Every one of these articles was a help, large or small, in my every-day life. She invariably planted them secretly in my room, the closet, a drawer, or even in my pocket, thus combining the care and thoughtfulness of a dutiful child and a good mother. She simply put the things in their places, and I would find them sooner or later, some of them perhaps too late. But it was mostly just when I felt the need of them. After her death I tried to list the articles on a sheet of paper, because the things themselves I hastily gave away lest I ever see them again. The incomplete list is in an envelope in my so-called files, along with other carefully cherished mementoes.

Here it is:

1. A German-English dictionary that I vainly sought at the beginning of the war, and thought was too expensive anyway. She had dug it up in some second-hand bookstore, and one day I found it among the old encyclopedias, where she had tucked it away days before without my noticing.

2. A little letter-scale, so that I should not have to keep running down with each big envelope to the hotel basement, where the only scale in the building was.

3. Some pills that I had to take, which were to be found commercially only in sugar-coated form, whereas the doctor had strictly forbidden me sugar. So I gave up that particular medicine. One day at my bedside table I found these pills, from which she had melted off the sugar in hot water. And she kept on doing it for years—always in my absence. All I ever saw was that the bottle was filled with unsugared pills.

4. When the doctor forbade me to put on weight, she found somewhere in town a low-carbohydrate gluten bread, and every evening she put it on the table for the next morning's breakfast. I never asked her to buy reducing bread.

5. Newer and bigger square patches kept appearing on one of my cashmere jackets, to which I had been superstitiously clinging for years. It gradually wore out so completely that there were more patches than original material. She knew my foolish devotion to the old, ragged Viennese jacket, so in New York she bought another one exactly like it; instead of persuading me to wear the new one, she cut it into patches so that she could go on mending the old one. (All this, of course, when I was out.)

6. After her death I found in a corner of a drawer a tiny bag containing what she called her button pharmacy; her sewing-kit for the secret replacement of shirt and coat buttons; needles, black and white thread, and a spool of red thread whose purpose I could not imagine for a long time, until someone told me that she had used it to mend

the tears in my red damask furniture (in the morning when I was out walking in Central Park, because she knew I would not have allowed her to do such work, what with all the professional upholsterers constantly employed at the hotel.)

7. In the same bag I found a strong, canvas-like material, carefully folded into a small bundle. Other people told me that with this she mended my trouser pockets, which were constantly wearing out from the weight of keys, change, pen-knife, and so on. She said—to other people—that she had found a much stouter material for my overtasked pockets than that used by the neighborhood tailor, who ordinarily made these small repairs. She bought the material, which was strong enough for sails, when an old pen-knife that I had bought in Budapest and carried for thirty years slipped through a hole and was lost, embittering me (as I need not explain to the superstitious) so much that I said, “Along with that wretched little knife I lost today the last remnants of luck that I managed to bring with me when I escaped.” Unhappily this silly superstition proved itself all too well founded in that year of 1947.

8. She often heard me complain that the waiters in the pantry would mix up my thermos jug, which was also my icebox. The jug even disappeared for some days. I could not imagine how to prevent this. One day a cardboard tag with the number of my room made its appearance, wired to the handle. Since that time there has been no trouble about the jug. I thought my good old waiter had tied the tag to the jug. I mentioned it casually to Wanda and praised him for his thoughtfulness. She listened without

saying a word. Some days later I encountered the waiter and thanked him. Only then did I find it was not he who had fastened on the tag.

(Once more I feel keenly how small, perhaps how downright paltry these matters are, but in spite of all writing logic I still struggle to be believed when I say that not only the purpose but the very *raison d'être* of this book is to analyze these minute happenings so long as there is a single trace of human values left in them. My only reassurance against misgivings is that this paragraph, for instance, is meant to be read only by the children of an old, lonely father, or by those very old mothers who have a lonely old son.)

Here are some more from hundreds and hundreds.

9. I used to keep finding my desk drawers full of smuggled electric-light bulbs, from the time when there was no light in my bathroom, and I had to call the electrician four times because he was busy elsewhere in the hotel.

10. My dark glasses got broken in my pocket. In the winter I bought new ones at Lake Placid on account of the blinding snow. When I reached into my pocket next day, they were in a stiff leather case. When I would look at her and ask, "What's this?" she usually said, "Nothing." At the moment, perhaps she was right. Now these "nothings" have begun to take on meaning in my grateful remembrance—though only, I suspect, in my own eyes.

11. One day a jar of so-called Vegetable Salt made its appearance on my shelf. The doctor had forbidden me the ordinary mineral salt for a few weeks. I had intended to lead a saltless life, not knowing there was such a harmless substitute for ordinary salt. "What's that?"—"Nothing."

12. What little hair I had was sometimes tousled by the electric fan in the elevator. She would then lend me her comb. One day I found in my pocket a tiny folding comb, just the right size for my remaining wisps. I carried it for more than ten years.

13. Just a few days ago we found, carefully hidden in the closet, a peculiar glovelike object. I was the only person who did not know what it was—a shoeshine mitt. One side was woolly, the other was soft, smooth leather. She knew I never had the patience to get a shine, either on the street or at a stand. She never spoke a word of objection, but simply shined my shoes in secret with this mitt. All I ever saw was that the shoes were always in order. I supposed it was automatic. No. The shoes got their high shine in the half-darkness of the closet, while I was chattering and joking with callers in the next room.

14. Nine years ago I bought two identical Swiss Omega watches in Geneva, one for her, one for me. We called them the Omega Twins. I overwound mine once in New York, breaking the spring. She took it to some watchmaker for repair, but he must have bungled the job, because after that it did not keep time. It would be ten minutes off in a day. She took it back to the watchmaker to be set right, and then brought it back to me. From then on the watch kept time perfectly. Afterward I discovered she had not brought me my watch, repaired by the clumsy watchmaker, but given me her own, which had always kept time, and still does.

15. My most cherished memento is a typewritten list of telephone numbers: the numbers of the people who frequently invited her out for the weekend. Above the num-

bers is the heading: TO BE CALLED WHENEVER NECESSARY, DAY OR NIGHT. I asked her, "What can you do if something goes wrong at two or three in the morning, a hundred miles from New York, even if I do call you up?" She replied, "Even from there I can dig up more and better New York doctors faster than either you or the night clerk." (She always took the numbers of our medical acquaintances with her on weekends.)



Although for some forty or forty-five years of my life I was quite a gay dog, our fifteen years together (which began ten years after my merry-Andrew period) were—thanks to the world catastrophe and our status as expatriates—calm, resigned, and subdued. It would scarcely be exaggerating to say that they were rather morose. One (but only one) of the reasons was that you could not honestly call Wanda gay.

But she had a lively sense of humor none the less. I used to hear her arguing with women; she would always make deft and witty retorts, almost invariably defending someone whom the gossip-happy émigré colony were attacking. She had a gift for repartee that was always pointed but never unkind. She never gave me any specimens of her talents. She always permitted me to be in the right, even when I was wrong. Often her very silence at crucial moments would show me that I was the offender.

During our fifteen years I remember only one remark of hers with a barb. (It was not made at me). We were sitting on a bench in Central Park when an elderly German refugee actress known to us all for her spiteful love

of scandal sat down, began as was her habit with a few saccharine generalities, and then settled to the serious work of blackening our common acquaintances. This was one of the things Wanda did not care for.

After the gossip had pulled apart half a dozen of our friends, she tackled a woman as given to slander as she herself. "A dreadful creature," she said. "We're not on speaking terms, we hate each other like poison."

"You're right," said Wanda. Then she added, "Both of you."



She had a sense of humor, but I do not remember her having joked with me. Except once, one afternoon a few years ago. In the end, with both of us taking part, it became a very bitter performance. That is why it still lives so vividly in my mind.

I had been depressed for days. My own state of mind had grown steadily worse, and then came a swarm of dreadful news and letters from Budapest. One of my oldest friends, Dr. George Ruttkay, got a letter saying that the Hungarian Nazis had murdered his mother, whom he worshiped. He did not recover from the blow, and never will. Detailed reports came about two friends of mine shot by twelve- and fourteen-year-old Nazi thugs. One was the poet Simon Kemény, the other Imre Roboz, the manager of my favorite theater. There was a letter about a sweet, beautiful, white-haired lady with heart trouble, a friend of mine, with whom I had been in love at the age of twenty (fifty years ago) without her knowing it, and who was now (1944) herded on foot along

with many other Jewish women, like cattle to an abattoir, along the road from Budapest to Vienna, which is some 170 miles. Seventy-five miles from Budapest the lady collapsed on the highway. The gendarmes conducting the group battered her beautiful head to pieces with the butts of their rifles where she had fallen. The same fate came to her sister, with whom she lived and who was taken with her. (The sister was the mother-in-law of my friend and fellow-playwright Melchior Lengyel of Hollywood.) Elisabeth Rendes, the wife of our friend and lawyer, a vivacious, pretty young lady, fell in the collapse of a staircase in a bomb-damaged house, and was instantly killed. After these horrors, it had almost a touch of low comedy when we heard that the traces of my life-work, whatever could be found of my books in Hungarian and foreign languages in bookstores and private libraries, along with thousands of other books, were carried off and burned by order of the government.

It was a dark, rainy, depressing day in late autumn. The lights in the Fifth Avenue stores were on by three o'clock. At five o'clock Wanda came down as usual from her room on the fifteenth floor to mine on the eighth, and knocked at my door. She came in, saying,

"Look here."

She twisted her face into a Charlie McCarthy expression, imitating the dummy of America's favorite ventriloquist to perfection. I had never seen her make faces before. Somehow it did not suit her. It was never her way to imitate anyone, which women are usually inclined to do.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Are you crazy?"

"I've been rehearsing in front of the mirror in my room

ever so long," she said. "From a photograph in a magazine. To cheer you up. You're always so mopish these days. Don't frown at me. I thought it would make you laugh, partly because it's something new for me—I've never done such a thing—, partly because I venture to say without vanity that it's good."

She did it again. "Good?"

"Very good," I said, not cheered but touched by her loving kindness.

"You try it," she said, seeing that the Charlie McCarthy grimace had not cheered me as she expected.

I tried.

"Not so good," she said. "Get up in front of the mirror. Take a good look at my Charlie expression, and then copy me. It takes practice."

We stood in front of the mirror, and she made Charlie McCarthy faces, and I copied them, until I could do it almost as well as she. I knew that deep down in her heart she was incurably melancholy because of the murder of her dearly beloved brother. (Sometimes, when she did not know I was watching her, I caught a fleeting moment of an expression for which the words spoken on Gethsemane would have been perfectly apt: Exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.) I knew, though she sedulously kept it from me, that she pounded her typewriter until dawn every morning, writing begging letters to American generals in Germany whom she did not know, and whose names she had only just discovered in the papers. She hoped at least to learn from them where her brother was buried. I have since discovered that she used to take the answers from the kindhearted American generals (who

unfortunately had no information to give), along with her recurrent crying spells, to my wife in 78th Street, and from there she would not come to see me until she had restored her normal appearance by dint of pills and cold compresses in her room—"He mustn't be excited."

But at the same time, even after hearing from the generals, she had rehearsed Charlie McCarthy faces in front of the mirror to cheer me up. The whole scene as we stood together, making faces before my mirror ("two broken human beings" as she put it), these two distorted and wretchedly grinning faces, this half-crazed pantomime duet, very nearly drove me into a faint. But I kept on anyway so that she should think she had succeeded in cheering me up. I did it in a mood verging on melancholia in the medical sense, in my sixty-eighth year, around me a world in dissolution, vying with Wanda to see who could make the most preposterous Charlie McCarthy face in the mirror.



About this time I remarked to her, "Many years ago, when I was young and carefree, I used to feel at home in the company of life's winners. Now I only feel at home in my great new family of losers."

CHAPTER 11

Let me begin by saying that I do not believe in spiritualism, nor in a meeting with our dead in another world, nor do I even believe that our dead watch us from other spheres. I wish that I like so many others, could believe in these last two.

Accordingly I do not regard what follows as a mystic bond between the other world and this, or between the dead Wanda and me, though the form in which it is set down might lead one to suppose I did. I repeat that I know all these events have taken place in my own brain and nervous system. But my mind was born imaginative, and has been trained through half a century of fiction-writing to make the mysterious seem credible. It has also been trained to believe these fictions during the process of creation. The mental activity that really satisfies and soothe

me is writing these things down as if I believed in such miracles. I consider these few prefatory words necessary because I do not want a chance observer, such as a doctor, to take this for belief in the supernatural, but only for a symptom of the—perhaps pathological—workings of a brain in trauma.



Wanda keeps constant watch to see whether my mind is sufficiently occupied with her. Whether I'm suffering enough on her behalf. Whether I miss her enough. Whether it has sufficiently come home to me that my life grows ever more impossible without her. She brings it to my attention with tiny touches, suitable to her modest nature. Nowadays I find myself failing to do some task that she would have done during her lifetime, taking unselfish pleasure in the doing. In a word, she does not like to have me substitute for her. She will not have me succeed in doing any such thing.

For instance, she will not let me sew. In monomaniac worship of her memory, I cannot endure to have anyone else sew my buttons on. She will not have anyone else making these small repairs in my clothes, whose necessity she always used to discover before I did. When I sew on a button nowadays—and I have sewn on a good many—I usually prick myself with the needle. She pricked me. I was sewing as she used to do, without a thimble, and one day I ran the eye of the needle into my right thumb. I was unable to write for days. She jabbed me. I had to give up this sort of substituting for her because my hand

eventually developed such a repugnance to sewing that I could not even thread the needle. I felt at the time that she would remind me with some minor mishap while I was sewing that what I was doing was really an attempt to prove I could do without her.

We had here a few plates, cups, tumblers, and silver. The moment our guests had left after coffee or drink she would wash all the dishes very carefully. Sometime when Wanda's women friends have been here lately, they have felt that they owed it to Wanda to wash the dishes before they left. It made me very uneasy to see someone else taking her place in any task, no matter how small. I no longer allow anyone else to do it. When everyone has left, I wash up. And she in turn will not have *that*. First, when I was washing up, she knocked out of my hand the pretty little cut-glass cocktail glass that I had bought her in a bar at Montauk. It smashed on the tile floor. This was although my hand did not shake, I was not hurrying, and I was carefully washing and wiping precisely because this was a personal memento of her. That was the first time when it flashed through my head that Wanda would not let me do her work. She wants me to miss her.

She started with her favorite glass. Then, in just the same way, she broke in my hands two beer glasses, both with white sailboats on blue waves, and then a pink plate. I'm very careful when I wash up, because she breaks something at my slightest mistake. It is quite new for objects to break in my hands. As far back as I can remember it has always been a rarity for me clumsily to break fragile things.

I make changes in my manuscripts. I correct, I insert, I cut, and so on. She used to type off the newly-written pages, often illegibly scrawled and interlined. She used to tear out the old pages and instead to fasten in with a brass paper-fastener the new pages she had just copied. It was I who taught her how to do it without tearing either the thin onionskin or the cover. I used to be very skilful at it. In my student days I bound all my own books. Wanda was a long time learning this bookbinder's knack from me, but eventually she could do it incomparably better and faster than I. Now I insert the rewritten pages in the script myself. But she jogs my elbow, and I either tear the paper near the fastener, or else punch the cover in the wrong spot. Once a brass paper-fastener cut my left forefinger. The doctor told me to paint it with iodine, bandage it, and wear a rubber stall for a few days. Nothing of the sort had ever happened to me before.

The new English translations of my old plays are copied in septuplicate by hired typists, of course with many mistakes. In the old days I used to correct the mistakes in the first copy, meanwhile making new small changes and cuts. Then Wanda would correct the other six sets from the first one in her tiny, round, copperplate writing, with the most pedantic care. (Pedantry was not her natural way; this was why I was so pleased that she could make such an effort for me.) Lately I have had several old plays typed, and now I correct the six copies myself. Wanda almost maliciously interferes with my hand, and succeeds in making me forget to correct some mistakes, commit new ones, and often cut not the line I want but the one below it. Wanda still wants to correct my manuscripts herself.

I could give many other examples, but as they all fall into this pattern, I will not write them down.

The heart of the matter is that Wanda wants me *constantly* to realize that she is no longer here. She knows that the smallest details of human life interest me more than great doctrines. (To put myself in the best light perhaps this is recognizing my literary limitations.) And precisely because she knows me, she reminds me by these tiny mementoes that recall herself, when she feels I'm not missing her acutely enough. And conversely, when I'm having a bad day, that is, when the fact that she is no longer here torments me even more than usual, she does not interfere with my little tasks. Then she will allow me to wash up, sew, insert pages in manuscripts, and make corrections.

On these occasions she does what she did so often in life (particularly when she was sick in bed.) She was pleased that I was worried about her out of affection, and at the same time she was sorry for me.



I have a new habit that I am apparently unable to get rid of at present. When I walk in the street, I watch the faces of the strangers going in the opposite direction, to see whether they look me in the face or not.

The origin of this habit is as follows. About six months after Wanda's death I was walking slowly down Fifth Avenue from Fifty-eighth Street toward Fifty-seventh. A uniformed policeman came toward me, and looked intently fixedly full in the face. He looked straight into my eyes. And went on without stopping. Strangely enough, I cor

not forget his look. If I may put it so, his look did not glance off me like the looks of other strangers; it went home, it *stayed within me*. My first thought was that I resembled someone wanted by the police. But afterward, a few weeks later, I had a similar experience on the street. An elderly woman coming toward me looked at me, eye to eye, in just the intense, searching way that one looks at an acquaintance one has not seen for a long time. Then, on another occasion, it was a little child that a woman was leading by the hand. I do not remember ever having observed or taken notice of such a thing before. It was only during those days that I was struck by the way in which few strangers coming toward me looked me in the face; men, women, children. After that I picked up the habit of persistently noticing the glances of strangers. Naturally enough only a few looked me straight in the eye. But those few glances made me nervous, and, to repeat my phrase, *stayed within me*.

Then one night, along toward dawn, I woke up. I tried to go to sleep again, which one only half accomplishes in such cases: you have a half-waking, uneasy sleep in which the street and corridor sounds of dawn mingle with fragmentary dreams. It was on an occasion like that that I thought I had solved the puzzle of the mysterious glances. For one fleeting moment it dawned upon me, in my half-waking, half-dreaming state, that not the policeman had looked at me, nor the old woman, but Wanda. She wanted—and wants—to see how I looked so long after her death. *She* is looking at me through the eyes of all those strangers. She is using their eyes, because she has no more eyes of her own.

CHAPTER 12

My seventieth birthday was on the twelfth of January this year (1948). On each previous birthday she had knocked on my door and come in, her arms laden with packages, and she would listen with her sad little smile to my reproaches. In vain did I forbid her long ago: she persisted in arriving with presents for each birthday. It always made me uncomfortable. As far back as I can remember, I have always had a sort of allergy against presents. On my birthday most of all. And she had a passion for giving them. Not only to me. She gave them to everyone imaginable.

"What's in that box?"—"A present."—"Where are you taking all those flowers to?"—"Irene's sick."—"What are you lugging in that package?"—"It's Lucie's birthday. Presents, presents!"

One afternoon she came into my room.

"Sylvia Lyons may call up to thank you for some pastry. Don't be surprised. I took a whole lot from the Vienna Pastry Shop to her children today."

"Were they pleased?"

"I don't know. The maid thought I was the errand-girl from the pastry shop. Let it go at that. I just said you'd sent it, and then I left."

Another afternoon, my telephone rang. A lady thanked me for the "wonderful roses" I had sent her.

"Roses?" I asked in embarrassment, having sent her nothing. Wanda made frantic signs that it was all right. When I hung up she said, "I sent the roses, but I put your name on the card."

"Why not yours?"

"People know I'm thoughtful anyway. They aren't quite so sure about you."

I simply could not break her of bringing me packages for my birthday. "It's no use your talking or getting excited, you won't stop me," she said.

"Why not?"

She shrugged. "Because I can't help it."

She tried to solve the problem by giving me things I had long needed, but had either forgotten or put off buying. Handkerchiefs, socks, the thinnest onion-skin paper, dressing-gowns . . . , and every other resource of her loving imagination in the struggle against my firm attitude of non-acceptance.

Last fall, after her death, I heard that in the summer she told a woman friend that this time she would fix my anti-birthday complex. She said she had plans for my

seventieth birthday against which I would not be able to say a word; I would be forced to capitulate. And sure enough, on this last birthday, I was surprised by tender attentions behind which I could suspect nothing but her little, dead hand. Her tenderness beyond the grave. Her finished "plans."



On the morning of my seventieth birthday, I went out to her in the cemetery. I took flowers for her grave, a snow-covered patch thirty inches square, the only real estate I had acquired in America, a bit of property that nobody can take from me by any manner of legal procedure. There is no more thoroughly protected private property in the world.

Sam Jaffe came with me, although he had been run into by a car the day before, and hurt both his knees in falling so that he walked with a pronounced limp. Tramping about in the deep snow, we looked for Wanda among the graves under their heavy blanket of white. I was very much ashamed that I could not lead Sam straight to Wanda's grave without hunting around. Wanda was very fond indeed of Sam.

We laid our flowers on her grave, and stood there in silence for a long time. In the vast, snowy serenity of the quiet cemetery, standing by the grave of tired little Wanda, driven with me half across the globe, I somehow felt that she had found rest at last—*that she had gone home*, after all the years in which we had been *stranieri*, *Fremde*, *étrangers*, and *foreigners* in so many countries,

always living out of our trunks. That summer she wrote to her friend Lucie in Paris, "We are tired and burnt out." And I felt that at last I could grasp the true meaning of R. L. Stevenson's epitaph, "Home is the sailor, home from the sea." I cannot tell why, but I felt a comforting intention on the poet's part.

Yet a moment later I remembered something that was like a knife in my unhealed memory. In spring and fall the two of us used to go walking before lunch on the sunny side of 57th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. She used to walk faster than I did. When she would thus leave me behind on the street, I would shout after her, "What's your hurry? If I hurried, it would be natural; *but you still have forty-five years left!*"

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Among many thoughts that whirled through my head, sometimes Sam's dead wife, whom I never knew except from her pictures, would stand invisibly between us. Wanda would surely have been fond of her, too. It is out of the question for Sam not have thought the same thing at the same time.

()

We stood there for a long time; then at my suggestion we went into a little tavern near the cemetery, where we were the only customers. I drank a glass of wine, remembering how Wanda always celebrated my birthday by touching glasses and toasting me with the old Hungarian saying, "God give you long life!"

Again we were silent. We sat mutely at a table, staring out through the glass door at the snowflakes that were now falling gently, and behind them, as if through a veil, the dimly visible headstones and crosses of the cemetery. Then we went back to the grave in the cemetery to take our leave. All we did was stand without a word, gazing at her name carved in the stone, which will always be the most incomprehensible and inconceivable sight of my life, a sight that I had never imagined I should live to see: her name on a tombstone.



This is also the place to mention the following. My wife told the story after the funeral. In advance of the last summer (1947) the two of them went off to find a room at a seaside hotel where I could get away from the New York heat. Their search brought them to East Hampton, Long Island. Here they found a good hotel and a suitable room. They were on the point of reserving the room when Wanda looked out of the window, and exclaimed: "For God's sake, we mustn't take this."

"Why not?" asked Lili.

"Look!" said Wanda, pointing out of the window. "This is nothing for Molnar. Look . . . over there . . . You get a clear view . . . a cemetery."

They departed at once, almost fleeing toward Southampton.

CHAPTER 13

Shortly after I went to visit her at the cemetery on my birthday, it occurred to me as I was dropping off to sleep that my more and more unbearable nervous state might be improved by accepting the advice of my friends: work. (As far back as I can remember, I have always given this same advice to people plagued by the same sort of troubles.)

The advice is good, but there's one thing wrong with it—it's not good for everyone. It's good for people who don't work alone, but are obliged to work by other, indifferent people. For instance the advice is excellent for a department-store clerk, who is assaulted by hundreds of people the moment he arrives at the store, and loaded with work from morning till night. Or for a lawyer, awaited at the office by papers, secretaries, telephone

messages, and clients who take up his time and wear him out. Or for a doctor, whose waiting-room is full of patients—with problems—the moment he gets to his office. They work, and while they work they are compelled by the pressure of others to forget. But how can there be even a moment's relaxation and forgetfulness of this unbearable tension for a person whose life work has consisted of shutting himself away alone and sitting down with paper to make his brain work? A brain that has for some time been concentrating obsessively on another thought for every waking moment, and is thus incapable even of starting such "work."

What was the middle road that might force this brain to do some mechanical work after all? The answer was really quite simple: write a play. Not a regular play, though, but one that would suit such a frame of mind. That is, a play not intended for production or for acting, but a play intended solely to bring about a momentary cure. What should it be like? It was bound to be a fantastic, irregular succession of scenes, eschewing the usual rules of the drama, and springing from the feelings, thoughts, dreams, daydreams, and figments of imagination that now assailed me day and night.

If I were to wait a year or two with all this—perhaps, perhaps—I might be able to make it into a play that would be close to my heart, and also touch the hearts of others. But I cannot—or I dare not—plan for years ahead. Genuine, deeply felt, heart-to-heart though that play would be, I shall have to give up writing it. Now I shall have to write a play with healing powers, as it were therapeutic. I must not even imagine as I write that the play will ever

get on any stage. Once, just once in this dreadful life, to write a play: completely without any consideration of success-hunting producers, hit-worshipping critics, and audiences magnetically drawn by popularity. A play meant to please no one but me, and even me only because it is intended to soothe agony, trying to turn back a flood into a river-bed once normal, but now eroded, abandoned, and perhaps spoiled forever. With the help of this work I might be able for a few months to tie down my at present so recalcitrant mind. On no other sort of writing could I possibly concentrate.

That very night the idea grew into an obsession. Write, write. A fantastic drama, its leading character the figure of a woman, into which I can put without any inhibition, as if in an unbridled eulogy, what I now feel for the dead Wanda. Forgetting that buildings tower around me, inhabited by basically sentimental people, many of whom, however, untruthfully boast that they despise sentiment, and call any emotion emotionalism. There is to be another character in this "play" (the quotation marks are mine), a man of only secondary importance, but able to speak a few bitter confessions about myself.

Writing in bed, I made notes in pencil on a little scratch pad. This feverish racking of my brain went on for hours. I knew I was trying to fulfill in an instant the whim of an injured nervous system. I knew I should never actually write the play. I knew that its first, last, and only performance would take place that night, in pencil on paper.

Nevertheless I punished myself in devising characters and situations. The pad was quite covered with nervously scribbled notes when I began to realize that nothing would

ever come of these confused jottings. Then I took my sleeping-pill, turned out the light, and fell asleep after long tossing and turning.

Some hours later I awoke, feeling not only wakeful, but highly excited. My watch said a few minutes after three. I went to my desk, arranged the sheets from the scratch pad, numbered them, and began scrawling off from them the outline of this never-to-be-written dramatic fantasy. The result was a scrawled, interlined, and much revised script. I was still working when the waiter brought in my coffee at eight in the morning, as was his habit. Then I went on scribbling. I stopped work after ten in the morning, first tearing up the greater part of it into tiny scraps and throwing them in the waste-basket.

I began to hate even the few pages of the script that remained, and the very idea that in my condition I had written the outline of a play on that theme. It did not turn out as I intended it. The prisoner who had served so many decades in the confinement of stage technique scarcely dared avail himself of his great freedom. At bottom he remained a prisoner. A free-running imagination, which however kept rushing back every minute into the open door of the jail. Apparently such people are sentenced for life.

Today, ten days later (January 25, 1948), I have re-read the surviving pages. Immediately upon reading the outline of the first two acts of the three-act play, I tore it up and threw it away. The outline of the third act I kept. I prolonged its existence until such time as either I or someone else should destroy it. Then, later, I took these pages out again, and decided to put down in the

present chapter of my confessions the outline of the third and last act, in all its primitive foolishness, confusion, morbid hyper-sensitivity, its anti-theatrical quality, unchanged, with nothing added or taken away. And I know it is incomprehensible, technically malconstructed, over-emotional and everything else that theatergoers heartily dislike between 8:30 and 11:00.

To me, however, this manuscript is no longer the fragmentary outline of an act in a play, but a brief document of my life. A sad memory. The recollection of a half-crazed night, unadorned, not beautified, without make-up. It is no longer an outline, neither scenario, synopsis, rough sketch, nor draft, but a *symptom*. If this mass of words that I am writing now is actually to be chapters of my autobiography, these scrawlings certainly belong there. One may see by it, if nothing else, how an agony that time has not even begun to soften, and only half numbed by drugs, has affected the mind of a writer who has so long punctiliously striven to appear a professional dramatist, and has followed so religiously the technical rules of his many-thousand-year-old profession that he has always drawn his loudest critical jeers for this very reason.

I am sure I am the first to do such a thing. No writer before me has ever published such a morbid jumble, which on both commercial and literary grounds belongs nowhere but in the ashcan. Yet there may be someone who will understand after reading it why at this moment I cannot withstand the compulsion to print the passage. And aside from them, there may be a few human beings—not literary critics, but old-fashioned, simple, honest doc-

tors—who will find some slight interest in it. Another thing: perhaps I am printing it because in these confused scribblings certain imponderables may be sensed that are missing from what has gone before.

I feel that this preamble is longer than it should be. But I have not cut it down because I do not want the following outline of the third act to fall prey to some ultramodern psychiatrist without my defense.

And another thing. The reader will find in the following pages passages that he will regard, rightly, as repetitions. The reason is that I used some of my already mentioned experiences and thoughts in the present "play." Practically all the plays of every dramatist contain autobiographical fragments. Most of these, however, remain undiscovered because it is not customary to preface dramatic works with any such detailed private confessions as the preceding pages of this book.



The title I gave to the three-act play was: NIGHT NURSE. The outline of the first two acts, which I destroyed, dealt with earthly and heavenly beings, and roamed over heaven and earth. The scene of the third and last act was laid on earth. The outline of this act begins with a description of the stage.

The stage represents a sickroom, with a man of forty-five or fifty lying in bed. Near the bed, in white nurse's uniform, sits the young night nurse, who looks twenty-four or twenty-five. (The young nurse must look as frail little Wanda looked when she was rolling bandages

for American soldiers in the Red Cross workrooms during the war.) It is night. A floor lamp lights the two heads—the patient and the nurse. At the rear is a large door leading to the rest of the apartment. It is sometimes open, revealing a lighted living-room. At the side is a small door leading to a corridor and so out of the apartment. The sick man is a writer. Once upon a time he was a humorist. He is suffering severely from heart disease. In the first scene there is also a doctor, who gives the man a morphine injection, and then exits into the living-room. The patient talks softly to the little nurse. The conversation is to be soft and suitable for a sickroom. In the course of the dialogue the nurse says something naive, at which the man smiles.

Fragment of dialogue:

THE NURSE

Don't smile so sarcastically.

THE MAN

I wasn't smiling sarcastically. I was smiling sadly. My face is so constructed, my eyes are set in their sockets in such a way, and my lips are so shaped that every time I smile it looks sarcastic. Believe me, it does. The same thing has happened with my writing. People have misunderstood some of it—not all of it. They laughed at things of mine that weren't made to be laughed at. I got money for it, and so I was a coward and kept quiet. The audience everywhere in the world laughed at a perfectly agonizing play of mine in which a lovelorn suffering actor in disguise seduces his own loose-living wife. Although, when writing it, in a hospital, I wanted to work

off the most searing pain of my young life. According to one of his German biographers, Molière, the deathless master of all comedy-writers, "sometimes put his own painful experiences in a comic light . . . his laughter is the laughter of a skeptic staggering under repeated blows of fate, who keeps putting on a comic show for others, and putting down his thoughts in comic plays." That's how people laughed at the plays of Molière's unworthy pupil, myself.

NURSE

I saw the play.

MAN

Well?

NURSE

I laughed too. Oh, how I laughed!

MAN

In that case I don't mind if people did misunderstand it. I'm glad they did. If you had such a good laugh, dear.

NURSE

Thank you for saying that. I have no greater pleasure than a kind word from you.

They fall silent. The man shuts his eyes, and falls asleep from the morphine injection he has just had. The nurse goes over to him, smooths his blanket, and looks for a time at the face with the closed eyes, and then bends over, and as tenderly as if she were kissing him with her hand, strokes the man's hair. She resumes her seat, and watches the sleeping man. She does not take her eyes off him. In the deep silence the small side door opens. A maid appears on the threshold and whispers to the nurse that the clerk

from the pharmacy is there. The maid disappears. Through the door enters noiselessly a simply, almost shabbily clad young man, with a medicine bottle in his hand. He has a pale, haggard, delicately-drawn face; small, youthful beard; big, burning eyes. He pauses on the threshold.

Fragment of dialogue:

THE CLERK

Here's the medicine the doctor prescribed. May I come in?

(He holds out the medicine to the nurse)

NURSE

(Takes the bottle, and kneels softly and humbly before him. She bows her head. She whispers almost inaudibly to him, not with surprise, but as if she had known him for a long time)

Lord Jesus. Sweet, kind, Lord Jesus. Here I am, dear, sweet, kind Jesus. Beautiful, kind, sweet, dear Jesus.

Here I must recall from the destroyed first act that in it the little nurse was an angel. One of the hundred thousand angels. A real angel, in heaven. Not a mystical Early Christian angel, a disembodied heavenly messenger, but rather a renaissance angel with the outward appearance of a fresh, girlish-faced, long-gowned, gently floating seraph by Fra Angelico. She stood on a cloud in a group with innumerable other angels. They argued with her because she was longing to leave the blue, white, and gold of eternity for the dirty, many-colored earth. She honestly admitted to her sister angels that she did not want to go to earth from sheer curiosity, but was drawn thither

by another, irresistible feeling that she had never known before and did not understand. Some of the angel hosts urged her on: "Go on down. You'll have an interesting trip. It may last sixty or seventy years altogether, or not even that long. It's really worth making a visit there. It's interesting, full of variety." They talked to her as clerks at a travel agency talk to people who are going on vacations. Others told her gravely, "Don't go, because you'll suffer. Living on earth means suffering." . . . "What is 'suffering'?" she asked. . . . "The worst thing that can happen to an earthly being," they told her. . . . "Is it so bad even if the earthly being was once an angel?" she asked. . . . "Then it's even worse," was the reply. But she was persistent and curious: "How long shall I—What was that word?—How did you put it?" . . . "Suffer." . . . "Yes, that's it. How long shall I suffer?" . . . "As long as you're a living human being," they answered. . . . "And how will the suffering end?" The answer was, "God will take pity on you and will free you from earthly living."—In spite of all this, she yielded to her longing, and went down from among them to take on a human body on earth.

Returning to the scene of the third act, which I had begun to describe, where the nurse knelt down before the clerk from the pharmacy: she goes on speaking softly to him.

Fragment of dialogue:

NURSE

When I came down here, I didn't know why I was coming. Now I know I came because of this sick man.

(She does not look up at the young clerk. Kneeling, with bowed head, continues very softly)

My heart aches, sweet, dear, beautiful Jesus. That's how I know I'm fond of him, because my heart aches. I know what it is. It's suffering.

Jesus offers to take her back among the angels. To free her from her pain. He tells her that even greater pain is in store for her, because she loves a dying man.

Fragment of dialogue:

NURSE

I know. And the closer he is to death, the more I love him. It's not the kind of love that they speak of between men and women. No, no, no. It's what You understood as love according to Your four biographers. This man is not my husband, not my lover, not my father, not my brother. He's my naughty, whimsical, pigheaded, dear, cantankerous, sweet, good, bad, only, old, adopted child. I'm the only one that can help him. Nobody else. And he knows it, too. That's why he loves me too. He loves me as he's never loved anyone in his life. I know he's condemned to death. That's just why I want to stay here beside him. Though each minute hurts me more than the one before. My heart burns and bleeds with pity, dear, sweet, good, beautiful Jesus. I'm sorry for him. I'm very, very sorry for him, dear, sweet, beautiful, good, beaten, tortured, killed, resurrected and ascended, sweet, good, gracious Jesus. My heart is almost bursting out of my body.

(She puts her hand to her heart, shuts her eyes, and heaves a sigh)

How good that I can tell you all this!

(To anyone who may object to the nurse's addressing Jesus in such an abundance of high-flown words, I say that I can imagine no other tone for an angel speaking to Jesus except the most naive and infantile praise, heaped up and constantly repeated.)

Jesus exits. The door shuts. The nurse rises from her knees, and looks long at the closed door through which Jesus went out. She is still looking when people under the direction of the doctor come in from the apartment to rig an oxygen tent over the bed. She does not awake from her reverie until the entrance of the patient's former wife, since remarried. The divorced wife kisses the nurse. A twenty-year-old boy, her nephew, enters behind the divorced wife. The divorced wife and the nurse stand with their arms around each other's waists in a far corner of the room. The patient beckons to the boy, and asks him in a whisper to summon his lawyer. He wants one last discussion of his will. The two women do not hear this. But it is plain that the patient means to take care of the nurse's future. The boy goes out into the living-room to telephone.

Fragment of dialogue:

THE DIVORCED WIFE

(To the nurse)

Well, it would just be one of the cases that occur so often in life where the patient marries his nurse.

NURSE

I don't want that.

MAN

But . . .

NURSE

Don't talk about it.

WIFE

It would be a fine thing if you did marry her now.

NURSE

(Raising her voice)

Don't talk about it. Not another word!

MAN

My, my, how fierce we are.

NURSE

(Smiling gently)

You think I'm fierce?

MAN

Not any more.

WIFE

The nurse is like an angel on earth.

DOCTOR

Maybe she is one.

The lawyer arrives. He talks in a whisper to the patient, holding up a document and taking notes. The patient signs the document. The doctor and the divorced wife witness it. Seeing this, the nurse is scared. She guesses that the document is the man's will. She begs the doctor to tell her frankly if there is even the slightest hope.

Fragment of dialogue:

DOCTOR

Because you've been so good to him, I consider you a member of the family—and because I see that in spite of all the kind people he really has no one in the world

but you. So I'll tell you honestly, yes, he's going to die very shortly.

NURSE

I knew it. But now that I feel from your words how near the end is, the idea begins to be unbearable.

(Puts her hand to her heart)

As if something had broken to pieces . . . in here.

Talking in an undertone so that the others shall not hear, she tells the doctor she is thinking of a way out that betrays weakness and cowardice: when the man dies, she will kill herself. The doctor calls this a cheap and ugly escape from the trials of life. He upbraids her with severity and conviction, adding that religion too forbids it.

Fragment of dialogue:

NURSE

Now that I stop to think it over, I can't imagine how I shall ever bear the minute . . . the half-minute of consciousness between the time he dies and the time I succeed in destroying myself . . . how I can endure even those few moments.

The nurse has an idea. She will escape from this minute, from this half-minute, by dying before the man dies. She never wants to feel what we mortals feel when someone we love most dearly dies. The man sleeps deeply under morphine.

Fragment of dialogue:

DOCTOR

It's almost his last sleep. Perhaps the very last.

(In the next room are seen the familiar group of relatives prepared for the worst, the wife, the nephew, and the lawyer.)

NURSE

What did you say? His very last sleep?

DOCTOR

Perhaps. I said, perhaps.

NURSE

Won't he wake up?

DOCTOR

I don't know. But I'd like not to let him wake up.

(He listens to the man's heart with a stethoscope)

NURSE

Is he still alive?

DOCTOR

Yes.

(Seeing the doubt on the nurse's face, hands her the stethoscope)

You listen to his heart.

NURSE

(Timidly listens to his heart)

Can I tell him something? Very softly? In a whisper?

DOCTOR

(Shrugs)

He won't hear it.

NURSE

(Stoops over the man, and whispers to him, not into his ear, but with her lips to his heart)

Forgive me for everything. For a long time I've always

forgiven you everything you said to me even before you said it. All I thought about was nursing you. I was nursing you even before you had any idea you were sick. I was nursing you even before there was a single doctor in all the world who knew you were sick. Never remember that you ever had a single argument with me. You mustn't ever think of such a thing again, not even if you fall asleep now . . . Never think of it in your long sleep . . . I don't want you to . . . I don't . . .

(Looks at the doctor. The doctor is taking the patient's pulse)

DOCTOR

Weak. But his heart is still beating.

NURSE

His heart has made me suffer so much. But only because his heart was ill.

(Softly she whispers to the patient so that the doctor cannot overhear)

If your heart stops now, I shall have nothing more to do in this world.

DOCTOR

(Points through the open door at the group in the living-room who are sitting up with the patient, waiting)

I'll join them. They're expecting me to offer them the hope I can't give them. But perhaps . . . comfort. I'll try.

(He gives the nurse a long, searching look. Then he speaks to her with deep conviction, in a tone that hints at forebodings)

I can feel that you want to be alone with him now.

The doctor almost tiptoes out to join the others in the living-room. The door remains open. They are all in view. The nurse sits down in an armchair. She looks long at the patient, with a gentle, sad smile. Then, immediately, she looks upward, as it were through the ceiling, up to someone whom nobody but she can see. Her lips move silently. Her face shows that she is asking for something from above, that she is begging to be relieved of her earthly life. Then her face grows calm. With a slow motion she reaches for her heart. Her head sinks back. Her hand slips slowly from her heart to her lap. She is dead. Her eyes close. There is silence in the room. After a long pause, the doctor breaks away from the group visible in the other room, and comes into the sickroom, carrying a small vial and the hypodermic needle. After him come the lawyer, the ex-wife, and the boy. The doctor steps to the man's bedside.

Fragment of dialogue:

WIFE

Doctor . . . I hardly dare to ask you . . .

DOCTOR

(At the bedside)

He's still asleep.

WIFE

Will he wake up?

DOCTOR

He might, if I don't give him another injection.

WIFE

I want to say goodbye to him.

THE BOY

The priest is here.

WIFE

(Looking at the little nurse, dead)

Ssh! She's asleep. Poor thing, she must be awfully tired.

DOCTOR

She was very tired. Yes. Very, very tired.

(He motions to the others to let the nurse sleep. All wait. Silence. The priest is seen appearing in the other room. No one moves.)

The patient awakes. The faces of the doctor, the lawyer, the divorced wife, and the boy change. They say a few words of forced gaiety. They start to tell him a bit of half-way amusing theatrical gossip.

Fragment of dialogue:

MAN

Softly, softly. Keep your voices down. My little friend's asleep.

They carry on their conversation in whispers. Suddenly the patient says he knows the priest is there, and there is no sense hiding it; the priest may as well come in. They summon the priest. The priest anoints the man's eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, hands, feet, and ribs. He murmurs softly: "Through this anointing of thee and through its most pious mercy, be forgiven all thy sins . . ." When the ceremony of extreme unction is over, the priest goes out. The wife accompanies him out, then comes back.

There is silence in the sickroom. Only after a long pause do they begin to talk again.

Fragment of dialogue:

MAN

The nurse is asleep. Let's let her sleep. We must take care that she doesn't wake up. Meanwhile we'll take leave of each other. God be with you. Don't you say anything to me, just look at me. That's how I want it. I'm saying goodbye to you because I'm going away. We mustn't wake the nurse for anything in the world. The kind nurse mustn't be here when I go. She must sleep through it.

DOCTOR

You must rest now, you're tired. You're all worn out with talking.

MAN

I know you want to give me an injection. I know what you doctors call euthanasia. A smooth, painless death. It comes in unconsciousness. I'm not a courageous man. Please do give me the injection.

The doctor gives the patient an injection. He waits a short time. No one speaks. Then the wife, the lawyer, and the boy go out. We see them through the open door in the next room. The doctor stands beside the patient, constantly listening to his heart with the stethoscope, and at the same time taking his pulse. Meanwhile the doctor occasionally glances at the little nurse. He is struck by the nurse's rapt expression, almost no longer human in its serenity. He goes over and examines her. Then he sud-

denly straightens up. He is visibly surprised, even shocked. He bends over the nurse again, and this time he begins to examine her as medical examiners do with the dead. He finds that the nurse is dead. He goes toward the living-room. Pausing on the threshold, he speaks softly to the group waiting in the next room.

Fragment of dialogue:

DOCTOR

The nurse is dead. Her heart stopped. But the sick man will never know it. I won't let him wake up now, never, never again. It's my duty now to telephone the police.

WIFE

And the patient . . .

DOCTOR

Still alive. Sleeping.

(Peremptorily)

This is his last sleep.

(Goes toward the others in the living-room. As he reaches the threshold, the clerk from the pharmacy enters noiselessly through the small side door, with another medicine bottle in his hand. The doctor says over his shoulder, going out to join the others in the living room:)

Put the bottle on the table over there.

(The clerk puts the medicine bottle on the table. Then he goes over to the dead nurse. He takes her tenderly under the arms, and raises her from the arm-chair. The nurse is deathly pale. She opens her eyes. Smiles very faintly)

NURSE

You did come, dear, sweet, kind Jesus. You came to get me, because my heart stopped beating. Oh, I know how my heart stopped. Because for a long, long time I wished it would. God took pity on me.

CLERK

Now you shall go away from here with me, my daughter.

NURSE

Where are you taking me, sweet, kind, beautiful, dear, merciful Jesus?

CLERK

To my big hospital. You'll be a nurse there. To the end of time. At my everlasting hospital, where all men are cured.

(The little nurse-angel obediently lays her head on the clerk's shoulder)

Don't cry, little angel.

NURSE

Do let me cry. It's such a good feeling.

CLERK

Crying is a sign of weakness. Crying is an earthly thing, little angel.

NURSE

You wept too. You must have wept when you said: "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.*"

CLERK

(Softly)

Yes.—I'll wipe away your tears.

NURSE

Don't wipe them away.

CLERK

I've wiped away so many.

NURSE

I'm shedding them. But they belong to him.

(They take a few steps toward the small side door.

The nurse stops)

I want to look back at him.

CLERK

Don't look back. Look forward. Into my world. Don't look at mortal life. Look at life eternal.

NURSE

Will they bury me?

CLERK

Your body, yes.

NURSE

Will they put me in the ground?

CLERK

In many, many coffins.

NURSE

What for? Why so many?

CLERK

Because your sick man loves you beyond the grave, and that's the only way he can show you how. They'll bury him in the same way. The witty writer. The gay fellow that made so many people laugh.

NURSE

He made me, too.

CLERK

Then your coffin and his will travel to a cemetery that he has longed for. There will be two stones side by side. With your name and his.

NURSE

Aside from the two stones, what will be left to us in the world?

CLERK

Very, very little. The ability and the desire of the few people who knew and loved you to remember you.

NURSE

Were there other people besides me who loved him?

CLERK

There were. But not many. Very few. But even of those, none ever loved him as you did. But you didn't love him so because he was worthy of this love. No. Because you could love more than mortal beings could.

NURSE

And how long will the people on earth who loved us remember us?

CLERK

The old ones, only a few years. The young ones, longer. But some day they'll die too.

NURSE

Who will remember then how much we loved each other?

(The Clerk sighs, and says nothing. They go out slowly. The nurse asks, stretching out her white, bloodless hand toward the patient)

When will he die?

CLERK

In a very short time.

NURSE

Tell me again that they'll bury my body beside his. Say it again, dear, beautiful, sweet, good Jesus.

CLERK

They will. That will be the earthly remembrance of the fact that two strange, strange people, neither of whom knew for years that the other existed, suddenly took refuge with one another, and remained together in this dreadful world. But it may be that in the strange country where you will sleep, nobody will realize it but the gravediggers who are ordered to bury side by side two people whose names are not the same.

(Approaching the exit, they pause a moment)

NURSE

(In a beseeching tone)

And I shall never, never have to come back to earth?

CLERK

No. Never again. Don't cry.

(They go out by the side door)

The picture remains just as it was: the room, the sick man in bed under the oxygen tent, sleeping his last sleep, and the little nurse sitting dead in the armchair exactly as she was before Jesus came to take her back to the place from which she so rebelliously longed to depart, from which (not even knowing why) she desired so irresistibly to come down to earth. The door to the apartment is still open. In the living-room we see the divorced wife, the boy, the lawyer, and we see and even hear the doctor as he picks up the telephone and softly, matter-of-factly, and briefly informs the police that the nurse is dead, probably from a heart attack.

The curtain falls.

This is the end of the notes for the final act of this

irresistibly scribbled, fragmentary, confused, never-to-be-written, stillborn play.



And so end these chapters of my autobiographical notes, which I began to write in the autumn of 1947, and wrote, with interruptions, up to the fall of 1948.